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Borden Chase · Theodore Roscoe

ARGOSY

RED STAR MAGAZINES 3-9

WEEKLY

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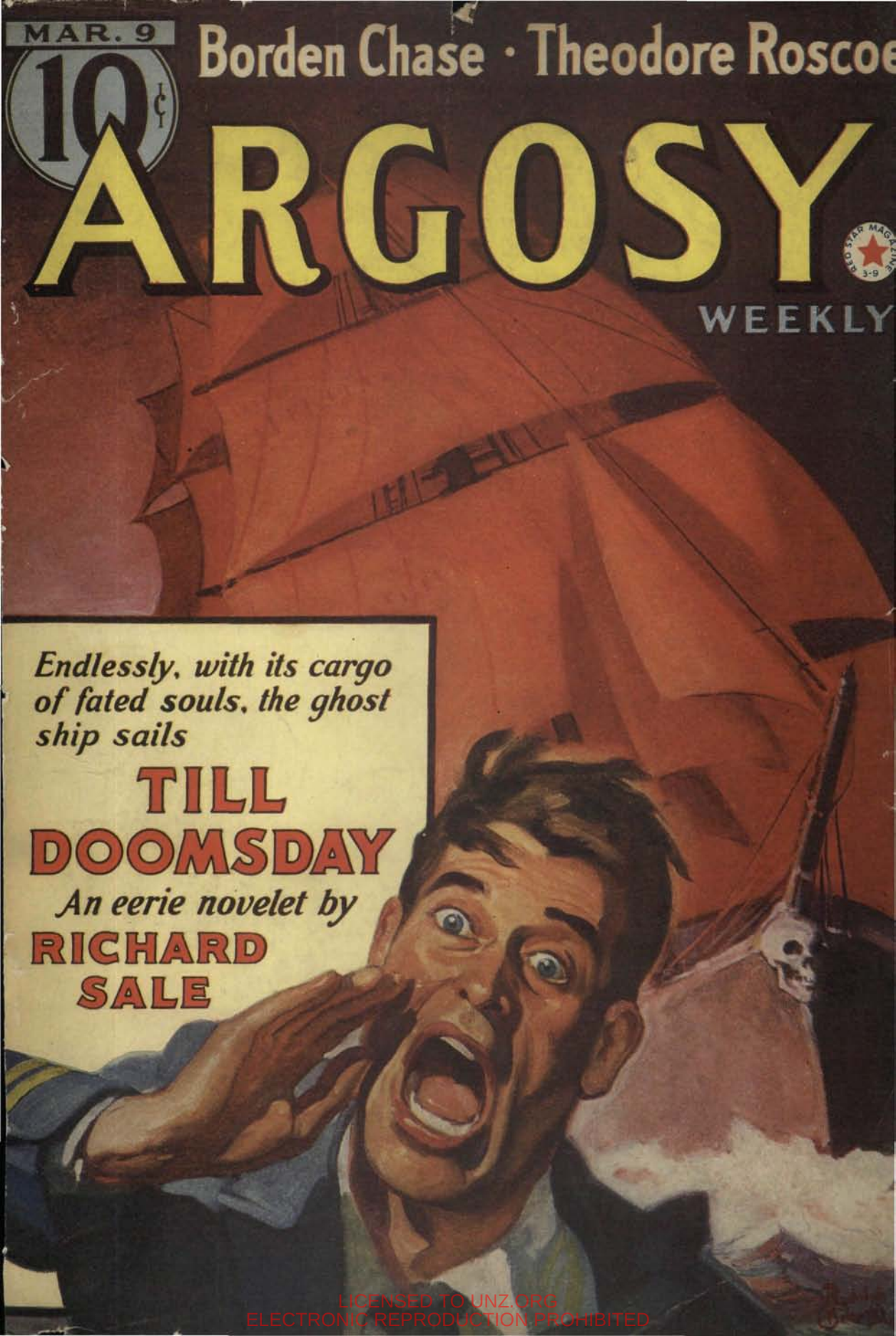
TILL DOOMSDAY

An eerie novelet by

RICHARD SALE



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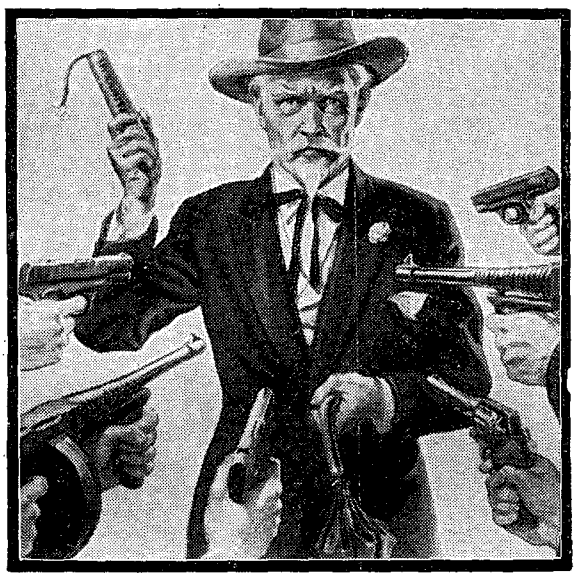
10¢ Detective APR.

DIME NOVELS



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Why Trained Accountants Command High Salaries

—and how ambitious men are qualifying by the La Salle Problem Method

GET this straight.

By "accountancy" we do not mean "bookkeeping." For accountancy begins where bookkeeping leaves off.

The skilled accountant takes the figures handed him by the bookkeeper, and *analyzes* and *interprets* them.

He knows how much the costs in the various departments should amount to, how they may be lowered.

He knows what profits should be expected from a given enterprise, how they may be increased.

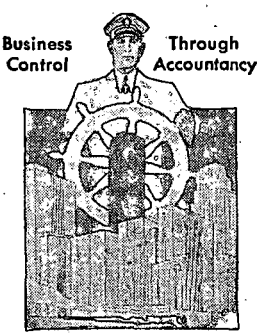
He knows, in a given business, what per cent of one's working capital can safely be tied up in merchandise on hand, what per cent is safe and adequate for sales promotion. And these, by the way, are but two of *scores* of percentage-figures wherewith he points the way to successful operation.

He knows the intricacies of government taxation.

He knows how to *survey* the transactions of a business over a given period; how to show in cold, hard figures the progress it has made and where it is going. He knows how to *use* these findings as a basis for constructive policies.

In short, the trained accountant is the *controlling engineer* of business—one man business cannot do without.

Small wonder that he commands a salary two to ten times as great as that of the bookkeeper. Indeed, as an independent operator (head of his own accounting firm) he may earn as much as the president of the big and influential bank in his community, or the operating manager of a great railroad.



Some Examples

Small wonder that accountancy offers the trained man such fine opportunities—opportunities well illustrated by the success of thousands of LaSalle accountancy students.* For example—one man was a plumber, 32 years old, with only an eleventh grade education. He became auditor for a large bank with an income 325 per cent larger.

Another was a drug clerk at $30 a week. Now he heads his own very successful accounting firm with an income several times as large.

A woman bookkeeper—buried in details of a small job—is now auditor of an apartment hotel, and her salary mounted in proportion to her work.

A credit manager—earning $200 a month—moved up quickly to $3000, to $5000, and then to a highly profitable accounting business of his own which netted around $10,000 a year.

And What It Means to You

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ARGOSY

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Volume 297 CONTENTS FOR MARCH 9, 1940 Number 4

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A smart young man may change his principles and his future when he's hanging by his eyebrows nine stories up

The Sun Sets at Five—*Second of seven parts*.....Borden Chase 39
Come up to my penthouse for dinner—and get the works

Till Doomsday—*Novelet*.....Richard Sale 60
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Cover by Rudolph Belarski
Illustrating Till Doomsday

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

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30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25
5.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
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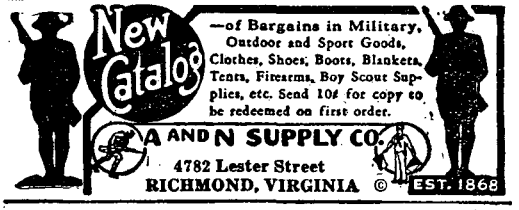

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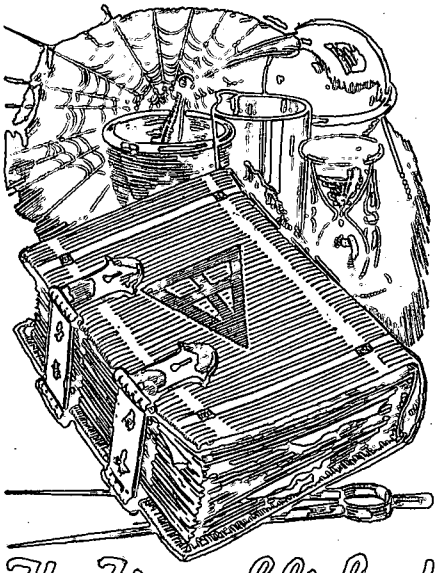

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Three Men and a Tub

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "Then Placid John Adams", "The Man Who Wouldn't Be King", etc.

I

Bathtub for Sale: Twenty-Gallon Capacity—Cast Iron—All Modern Conveniences Including Installed Chair and Charcoal Stove at Foot—Short Size, but Truly Fit for a King—Ye Interested Parties Seeking Magnificent Bargain Please Communicate This Department New Orleans Times-Picayune—1803.

HAD you lived in New Orleans in 1803, you might have read such an advertisement in your morning copy of the *Times-Picayune*—had there been an 1803 edition of the *Times-Picayune*.

You didn't live there at that date, and there was no such edition of the *Times-Picayune*, but there was (and still is) such a bathtub. You may see it any time you care to in the old Cabildo Museum down below Canal Street—as fantastic a household appliance as any concocted in that early era of bathing and the machine age.

In shape, the tub resembles a great

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Like a fury Madame X charged through the door, knocking Talleyrand head over heels

shoe. The prospective bather would sit himself in this shoe, his chin thrust over the rim, while slaves filled the vessel with hot water. A charcoal stove in the boot-toe serves to keep the water warm while the bather, ensconced like Mother Goose's Old Woman, may relax and soak in comfort. At the same time, if he cares to do so, he may modestly converse with the ladies and gentlemen in his court.

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things about Thomas Jefferson. Idolized by all Democrats today as the father of Jeffersonian Democracy, he was elected to the Presidency (1801-1809) by the Republican Party. He gave us our American money system of dimes and dollars, and in his last years went privately bankrupt. A firm believer in temperance, his wine bill in the White House ran over ten thousand dollars. Devoutly religious, he believed Christianity could be condensed to the Sermon on the Mount, and he was publicly howled down as an atheist by the President of Harvard University. Great humanist, he thought the people were fools.

Did you know he was an architect? An inventor? A writer? Philosopher? Scholar? Accomplished musician? As well as an orator? Lawyer? Political leader? Patriot? Diplomat? Founder of our American Republic and third President of the United States?

Go to Monticello and see the amazing and beautiful thirty-three-room house that took him thirty-two years to build. See his own designs for the building. The music he composed. His extraordinary "elevating bed." His fine drawings and handwriting. His set of razors named for every day in the week except Thursday.

If he didn't have time to shave on Thursday, it's no wonder. Expert linguist, he studied and spoke Greek, Latin, Spanish, Italian, German and French as well as English. He wrote three volumes on politics and eighty volumes of letters. Meantime, he ran a plantation, raised a beautiful daughter, planned the University of Virginia, and in his spare moments dabbled in everything from surgery to astronomy.

Lay aside such lofty historical titles as The Sage of Monticello, and imagine the man! Scholarly, yet possessed with the energy of a dynamo. Aristocratic, yet all for the common people. A polished, gallant Southern gentleman, yet entirely unassuming.

If there were paradoxes to Jefferson, they came from his amazing versatility—many-sided, he could see many sides. He was a pacifist, but he approved of Shays's Rebellion against the government as something to keep the people on their toes—the people would only appreciate Democracy when they had to fight for it. "The Tree of Liberty," he said, "must be watered with human blood."

He wanted peace; argued against a large standing Army or Navy. Then he was forced to arm to the teeth and vote for a stout-fisted battle fleet. It doesn't do to shake your fist at a man like Thomas Jefferson.

And the bully who did shake a fist at Jefferson—and incidentally the rest of our United States—was a little man, a scowling pint-sized Corsican, a one-time corporal, squatting in one of those iron shoes with a charcoal stove in the toe over there in a back room of the Tuileries Palace in Paris. If we introduce this fellow clad only in his skin and be-medaled with soap bubbles, it is only because that was one of his favorite uniforms.

From here on this isn't strictly history (although the background is authentic) but here's the story—

NAPOLEON dropped the soap and glared over the rim of his tub at Josephine and Talleyrand. Sitting in a mist of steam, he might have been some sort of pagan idol.

"Talleyrand, have you forced that treaty from Spain as I ordered?"

"Spain is at your feet, Sire."

"Has Marshal Victor conquered all of Austria as I commanded?"

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"Practically all Europe is conquered, Sire."

"*Magnifique!* Then get out of here, all of you! A new conquest must be planned at once. Leave me my map!"

This is doubtless a pretty free translation from the French, but you can read its equivalent in the pages of world history. Napoleon was taking one of his historic hot baths. It is the fashion of dictators to be eccentric, and the Little Corporal set the fashion. His specialty was the hot bath.

Relaxed, then, in his unique tub, he wiped steam from his eyes and consulted the map.

Oui, Talleyrand was right. All Europe, with the exception of Russia, had been conquered. Moscow, of course, was the usual question mark, and he didn't want to bother with it yet. England, too, was waiting her turn, but England could wait. What he needed just now was an easy victim. Conquerors, as any one knows, must keep on conquering—nothing like a conquest to keep a dictator on his throne.

But with Europe laid out neatly in pelts, the season had been slow. All dressed up with no place to go, the armies were getting restless. The Treasury needed money. *Sacré bleu!* something had to be conquered and conquered quick, or the public might rebel because of the taxes.

Such were the Little Corporal's thoughts while he sat a-tubbing and a-mapping. Then his eye glinted brightly as it fell on one corner of the map—a corner of the map he'd been saving for just this sort of doldrum. The map in his hands was not the map that hangs on your study wall today. Europe and the Atlantic Ocean had much the same outline, but the country west of the Atlantic was different.

All over the north sprawled Canada. Florida belonged to Spain. There was a strip of coastline marked the United States, but it didn't extend much westward of the Appalachian Mountains; the miles and miles of blank territory beyond belonged to Spain, too. That was the Territory of Louisiana. New Orleans at the bottom, and miles up the Mississippi.

OF COURSE, it didn't really belong to Spain. La Salle had claimed it first in the name of France. The Spaniards had taken it later. But now that the Little Corporal had taken the Spaniards, the territory, to all intents and purposes, belonged to him. To all intents and purposes! Well, so far he hadn't had any use for it, but now Napoleon Bonaparte, First Consul, there in his Paris bathtub, saw a use for it.

"Talleyrand!"

"I am coming, Sire."

"Talleyrand, you rascal, do you see that stretch of Louisiana Territory over there on the American Continent?"

"But, name of a blue pig! Louisiana belongs to Spain. Spain, so to speak, belongs to us. Surely there is no need for us to conquer Louisiana."

"Who said anything about conquering Louisiana? I propose to *buy* Louisiana!"

"Buy it? But you already own it!"

"Not openly, thick-head! The King of Spain is my puppet, but outwardly he appears to rule. I intend to do this legally, all very open and above-board. I shall send my brother, Lucien, to close the deal. The Spaniards won't want to do it, but we shall convince them.

"For payment we shall offer those nincompoops the Kingdom of Etruria—what loss to us, since it belongs to

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the Duke of Tuscany?—and we will promise the Spanish king to keep Louisiana forever in his name. And now that we have bought Louisiana"—Napoleon grinned, for when he made up his mind, a matter was already settled—"we will land our invincible army in New Orleans."

"But, Sire, I do not understand!"

"You are only my foreign minister; foreign ministers are not supposed to understand. Nevertheless, I will try to explain. Look there in the Caribbean. Do you see our island of Haiti?"

"Our troops are already fighting in Haiti, *oui.*"

"We will send more troops to Haiti. Thousands of troops. From there they will be carried to New Orleans. I will have such an army in New Orleans as the world has never seen! My veteran grenadiers. My *grognons*. Fifty thousand cavalry. As many cannon!"

"But your conquest, Sire! Name of a name! Why move a vast army into New Orleans if you have bought Louisiana legally and there is nothing over there to conquer?"

Napoleon's quick eyes glittered. "Look at the map, you fool. Who said nothing over there to conquer?"

Talleyrand stared. Then a slow, crooked smile cracked the lower part of his face. Napoleon, tracing a certain outline with a soapy finger, chuckled. Presently he began to laugh. Marshal Victor looked in, let loose a guffaw. Josephine, entering with towels, broke into peals of mirth. Napoleon's brothers joined the scene to howl. Two minutes later the whole imperial bathroom was doubled up and roaring.

You can see Napoleon lifting a sudden, wet arm for silence. Gripping his foreign minister by the elbow.

"Have you ever failed in a diplomatic trick, my Talleyrand?"

"No, Sire."

"Has our Madame X, ever failed?"

"Invariably she gets her man."

"Have I ever lost a conquest."

"You are Napoleon. Invincible!"

"Very well, Jefferson's new ambassador is due here within the month. We will work on this yokel as soon as he arrives. Meantime, the armies will be secretly mobilized. The fleet is to stand prepared. Personally, I think I am going to enjoy the American climate. And by the way, order the imperial iron-works at Marseille to ship that new bathtub they are making for me to New Orleans!"

II

THOMAS JEFFERSON, President of the United States, sorted his morning's mail. A letter from the Butchers Guild of Philadelphia—hoping the prize, slaughtered calf had reached him in good condition and that he would enjoy choice cuts from same. (Too bad the meat had spoiled in the four days journey to Washington; he must thank the worthy butchers in the name of the Republic.)

A letter from a Boston clergyman accusing him of heresy, anti-Christian activities and atheism "that will endanger the virtue of our citizens to the extent that the flower of our womanhood will not dare set foot in the streets." (Hypocrites! Bigoted, narrow-minded, blue-nose hypocrites!)

A letter from a New York banker advising Thomas Jefferson that his latest speech, favoring the farmer and workingman, would reduce the country to a state of anarchy. (These plutocrats would substitute money rule for monarchy; make riches the measure of a man; evolve an aristocracy of dollars!)

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A letter from the Dey of Algiers declaring that he, the Dey, was not quite satisfied with the yearly tribute of twenty-one thousand dollars paid by American seamen for the privilege of sailing through Gibraltar unmolested, and would appreciate an extra forty thousand. (Well, those scoundrelly Barbary pirates! If John Paul Jones had only lived to deal with them! A time is coming, Mr. Dey, when you and your blackmailing Arab Corsairs are going to be blown off the map!)

A letter from a certain agent in France, postmarked Paris—

"What's this? What's this?" Thomas Jefferson sat bolt upright in his swivel chair.

He read the letter once, twice, again! It was a missive in code—a piece of information that made the threatening piracy of the Algerian Dey look like small-time racketeering in comparison. A cold, steely light came to Thomas Jefferson's eye. As he re-read the letter, his jaws set like iron. That fellow now! Sweet Land of Liberty! Of all the villainies! Well, the miserable old Dey would have to wait. America had a bigger fish—the biggest shark of all, by heaven!—to fry.

"And he's already sent over his new bathtub!"

Thomas Jefferson reared, quivering, to his feet. Six-foot-two he stood, tall and straight as George Washington, but even quicker than Washington would have been to see the implications of this villainous scheme. Subtle Jefferson knew subtlety when he saw it. The danger to the United States—its Army disbanded; its Navy miniscule—was appalling.

The little republic was like an eaglet, wobbly, scarcely feathered, overshadowed by a gigantic, carnivorous, cruel-beaked hawk. Seas would mean nothing to this menace, whose talons were already fastened on New Orleans. At the moment its hungry grip was clutched on the island of Haiti. The Haitian slaves were struggling for freedom, but the tiny army of Toussaint L'Ouverture could never dispossess this devouring gargoyle, for all the black general's amazing genius.

What a trick! The revolt of those poor Haitian slaves was giving Napoleon just the excuse he wanted for transporting his army to the Western Hemisphere. He had forced the wretched Spaniards to give him New Orleans. A blind man could see he didn't want that outpost to plant pineapples on.

THE short hairs bristled on Jefferson's neck. Napoleon! Where could unprepared America, menaced by such a giant, find an ally? England might help with her navy, but England was uncertain; the British people favored American Democracy, but could you trust the British ruling class?

Spain, Rome, Prussia—their despot rulers under the thumb of a greater tyrant—all would be glad to see the United States assailed. Since the inception of diplomacy it has been the practice of European powers, imperiled by some war lord, to throw the little fellow to the lions. Appeasement is not a new diplomatic device. Thomas Jefferson realized in a second that the U. S. A., the fledgling eaglet, had been selected for the sacrifice.

That made Thomas Jefferson mad. As with men who don't anger easily, it made him mighty mad. Always he'd been willing to arbitrate and listen sympathetically to the other fellow's point of view. At heart he was a pacifist, for he knew full well the agony of warfare from his experience

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in the American Revolution. As President he'd voted for disarmament, and he'd stood, with George Washington, against entanglement with foreign military alliances.

And this was what America got for it! It was singled out as an easy mark by the first bully that came down the pike. The old Dey of Algiers had been getting under Jefferson's collar, but he'd been holding his temper, advising patience. This new pirate was too much.

Thomas Jefferson did a clicking right-about-face from pacifism. He sprang to his desk and prepared an order calling for eighty thousand volunteers.

But arming would take time, and that conqueror across the Atlantic had his barkentines and bayonets ready to go. At present the American Navy amounted to four frigates, some rowboats and a sloop. It was hardly possible that our volunteers, tough as they were, would be a match for the veteran grenadiers and cannons of the Little Corporal.

So, on second thought, Jefferson did another about-face. Summoning Madison, his Secretary of State, he proposed an alliance with England by which the British were immediately to "capture" New Orleans in case of an American-Napoleonic War. He even suggested that the British should, for the time being, hold Louisiana, in preference to Napoleon and his well-known real-estate agents. He wrote a famous line that has come down through history: "From the moment that France takes possession of New Orleans . . . we must marry ourselves to the British fleet and nation."

But Jefferson didn't want that kind of shotgun marriage; the United States wanted a friend, but it hadn't thought of matrimony. Having proposed, Jefferson knew he must do everything in his power to stall off the ceremony. Suppose, once settled in New Orleans, the Red Coats refused to withdraw? No, if Napoleon was a dangerous neighbor, J. Bull was equally dangerous.

UNDER any circumstance, war was impossible. Napoleon must be stopped in some other way. How? His baleful genius didn't stop at military craft; as a statesman he put Machiavelli in the shade. His mouth-piece, Talleyrand, tore up treaties into scraps of paper, made promises only to shatter them forty ways. Diplomats visiting the French court were gulled, tricked, beaten down, bought up and hoodwinked like bumpkins in the parlor of a card-sharp.

Jefferson, who had to send a green ambassador into this spider's-web, stared in desperation at the secret letter.

Now there's no historic confirmation for this agent's letter (this is fiction, remember) but the situation is historically authentic. We had our agents in Europe at the time; such a letter is highly possible.

It warned Jefferson of the Louisiana danger. Napoleon, it went on to say, was diplomatically about as trustworthy as a crocodile. Invariably an envoy sent to deal with him came away in utter defeat. Always his methods were the same. First the envoy would be threatened, denounced, terrorized, browbeaten. Failing intimidation, the next step, operated by Tallyrand, was bribery. Should the envoy survive these two generally fatal operations, he was subjected to a final pressure—a certain Madame X whose methods, so far as our espionage department had been able

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to determine, had never been resistible.

"War," the letter went on to say, "is the alternative. That, with Napoleon, is always fatal. Yet diplomacy seems equally fatal, for no diplomat in Europe has so far been able to withstand the threats, the bribery, or the guile of Madame X."

III

THOMAS JEFFERSON walked the floor. America had never been in a tougher spot, and he knew it. No time to consult Congress. No time for politics and long-winded Senatorial harangues. He had to stop the Little Corporal, and stop him fast.

What had brought Napoleon to draw a bead on the United States? He needed a conquest, of course. What would a conqueror, greedy, lustful for power possibly want more than a conquest? Napoleon seemed to have everything in the world one man could need. Was it just barely possible there was something he needed besides a conquest, something he didn't have?

"I might find a way out," Jefferson thought, "if I could just think of something Napoleon needs more than a conquest."

Well, he put on his thinking cap, and Jefferson's thinking cap was no mean article of headgear. When he gathered his wits that day to tackle that problem, he had plenty of wits to gather. He dismissed his secretary and paced alone. He thought and thought and thought. But there wasn't any easy answer. He wrestled with that problem until the perspiration sprinkled out on his forehead, and still he didn't have his answer.

Going to the cabinet—not his political cabinet, but the one in the corner of the room—he took out his violin. Music always eased him at a time of strain; he fingered the instrument lovingly, and played a quiet little composition he had written the day before.

As if some devil possessed his fingers, the tune strayed into martial chords—an air he recognized as the *Marseillaise!* Good heavens! he couldn't fiddle while that American Foreign Policy burned. Tucking the tactless instrument back into its case, he picked up his long clay pipe and forced himself into a chair.

But he'd never liked tobacco, and he wasn't the sort of man who could sit idle. Seizing a pencil, he began to sketch on a pad—a design for window curtains he wanted for his house at Monticello. Interior decorating was one of his hobbies; instead of doodling like an ordinary man distraught, he sketched valences, bannisters, ceiling decorations or floor patterns for the mansion he was planning. But today it didn't work. He threw down the pencil. Instead of window curtains, he'd been drawing French flags!

Maybe a look at the sky would clear his head. Afternoon was waning, and there were early stars. Jefferson loved the stars. They were in the American flag. He unwrapped his telescope—astronomy was his special hobby, and he prided himself on being one of the first Americans to calculate an eclipse—and he took up his position at a window.

The sun had westered, and the sky over Washington was evening blue. Ah, there was Arcturus, shining like Ohio which was just coming into the Union. There was old Alpha, gleaming new as Tennessee. But there was Venus, bold as—as Madame X? And Sirius, the elusive dog-star. And—and Mars!

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Yes, Mars—low and red in the sky like a burning coal—or a war-like, menacing eye! And in the east a great pile of rumbling, smoky clouds—clouds that blackened and gathered as they moved in off the Atlantic toward America. Baleful lightning played behind the storm-heads. There was a nearing echo of thunder. Hastily, Thomas Jefferson closed the window.

His jaw was grim. That sky was an omen, and he was getting nowhere. He kicked into his carpet slippers and put on his old brown house-jacket. Every fiber in him was a fiddle-string. His mind must be elastic. He must relax. Pacing across the floor, he picked up a volume on finance. A little easy reading. Hamilton said the money system was imperfect; maybe he could tinker up a new coin. A five-cent piece! That might do the trick. What this country needed was a good five-cent piece. Everybody would like it. Everybody needed money.

"Everybody!"

Thinking aloud, Thomas Jefferson broke off with a stifled shout. His fist came down on the finance book with a crash. By George! he had it. How to deal with Napoleon. It was a chance. A mighty risky chance! Everything would depend on the ambassador. Sweet Land of Liberty! Somehow, somewhere, he must find the right man. A man who could withstand the threats of Napoleon, the bribery of Talleyrand, and the *coup de grace* of Madame X!

THAT was no small order—to find a man who could beat that triple threat—and Jefferson clutched his forehead. It was like some terrible algebra; having solved one brain-crusher, he was up against another.

The smartest statesmen in Europe, the cagiest diplomats, the toughest kings had crumbled before Napoleon like so much clay. Americans were new at this game of international diplomacy; an inexperienced player would have about as much chance in Napoleon's court as a hayseed in a New York gaming house.

The man who went to France must have the courage of Richard the Lion Heart; the integrity of George Washington; the invincibility of Sir Galahad! Such men don't grow on trees, even in the United States of America.

Jefferson went down the list. He would've gone himself but he couldn't leave the presidential chair. He couldn't send trustworthy Madison, and his friend, James Monroe, was away on state business. John Adams would oppose him in the matter of policy, and his temper was too uncertain for delicate foreign relations. Pinckney, Hamilton, Aaron Burr—all the old hands he might have counted held governmental posts from which they couldn't be removed. If George Washington and Ben Franklin were only alive! Where now could he find an unbeatable ambassador?

So he was up against another poser, harder than the first. He forgot that he'd missed his lunch and dinner. Forgot the reception that evening for the British ambassador—that pompous little man! Once more pacing the floor, he went over every available American he could think of, analyzing character, examining their records. This one? That one? Which one to send. One fell down here; another there and every minute counted. He had to decide on his ambassador with no time to decide in, and the whole history of the United States would depend on that decision.

Jefferson's heart sank. But he didn't give up the search. He took off his

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coat and rolled up his linen sleeves, and went over the records again. The clock ticked like a metronone, and his head began to ache. Time out for a glass of wine; he must pull his thoughts together; keep cool.

It was like a world-shaking chess game—his move—everything depending on his choice of piece. Too much hinged on this decision. He was white with tension, and his hand on the Madeira bottle was trembling.

He pulled himself up. None of that, now! He'd been in sore need before, and always pulled himself out. Necessity was the mother of invention.

Ah, that was a way to sharpen his wits. Going to his desk, he sat in the swivel chair he'd invented, took a reassuring spin, and rummaged in a gadget-littered drawer. There was the pedometer that had been such a problem—the little machine that measured the mileage one walked. Perhaps some day he would attach the thing on a wagon. And there was his little model of a semaphore signal by which he could wigwag messages from his house to neighbors on surrounding hills. There was the design of his famous plow, and here was the working model of a dumb-waiter he was going to install in the dining room of his house, and another little model of his famous folding doors, and a new-style weathervane.

He ranged these thingumbobs on his desk and tried to relax, tinkering with his inventions. But the pedometer reminded him of marching feet. The semaphore of military signals. The weathervane of War Clouds in the sky. Glumly he pushed the inventions aside; returned to the unrevealing records.

He must find a man who wouldn't fear Napoleon, yet keep cool while the Corsican shouted. A man with a level head. A diplomat. But diplomacy was Talleyrand's department—Talleyrand, the coiled snake. How many men could resist that sort of poison? And then Madame X! Those that weren't hotheaded were liable to be hot-blooded. Jefferson, the psychologist, knew he must find one man in a million.

THE capitol was asleep that night, but the President wasn't. Amidst guttering candles and hundreds of written records, he was hunting an ambassador. Midnight, he bolstered himself with coffee, and for relaxation he wrote some notes on surgery, how to set a broken leg. But surgery reminded him of battlefields—the bloody harvests in America if he didn't find that man.

Desperately he returned to the search. One after another he rejected possible names. He couldn't take a chance; he had to be certain. Three A. M., hair tousled, neck-linen askew, aquiline features lined with fatigue, he was on the point of exhaustion.

He was concentrating too hard. For a moment's recess, he penned a memorandum on the right way to bake brick and manufacture nails. Nails! He ought to be thinking of a way to manufacture bullets. Deliberately he turned to his drawings of a wall he planned for the future University of Virginia — a serpentine wall, one brick in width, of such cunning engineering it would one day be considered an architectural marvel. Dear heaven! if he could only build a similar wall around America.

He braced his elbow on the desk, leaned his forehead on the heel of his palm. His lips hardened in self-scorn. Ha! They called him the Sage of Monticello! The great thinker. The great inventor. The great architect.

Well, he couldn't even think of a workable way to beat Napoleon.

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Inventor, bah!—he struck his models aside—if he could only invent a robot to go to France, that would be something. As for architecture—his restless, brilliant eye swept scornfully across the plans for his house at Monticello; the dining room with its dumb waiter, the second story concealed from the outside, the ballroom with its parquet floor where guests would dance and play pretty charades; the bedroom with its elevating bed and servant's compartment hidden in the wall—as for architecture—!

"Hidden compartment! Charades!"

Thomas Jefferson spun up out of his swivel chair. He grabbed up the plans of his house. Fatigue vanished from his features. His eyes shone. By Old Glory! he hadn't found his man tonight—but he'd invented a way to find him!

IV

HE DIDN'T dillydally, then. Not for an instant. Crack of dawn, he had his Secretary of State on the job and the machinery of government turning. First thing was to make that play for England's help; then let Napoleon know he was angling for such an alliance.

Next thing was to start Army recruiting and propose a Big-Navy Bill. Nappy was to learn about that, too—the news to be conveyed through secret channels so the Little Corporal would think it was a leak. They had their way of doing such things in those days, same as today, and you can read about all that in the history books.

Then Jefferson set to work a machine that isn't in the history books. It isn't in the history books because it was all very secret—a fiction secret—and even the historians can't find out about a fiction secret. But this story has it that thirteen secret messages were sent post-haste from Washington that dawn. Thirteen secret messages to thirteen different men.

The story doesn't say who those thirteen men were (save the last) for that is a fiction secret, too. Some of them fell by the wayside, as we shall see, and it doesn't do to discredit anyone in fiction.

Anyway, next afternoon they began to arrive. They came to Washington on horseback, spattered and muddy from hard galloping over the early American roads. They came by stage coach and gig, and several afoot. Some came from Virginia, and two from Philadelphia; a couple from New York, and one all the way from Boston in a racing sloop.

From the window of his study Jefferson, busy with his drawing board, watched them come up Pennsylvania Avenue. End of the week, all thirteen were there. On tenter-hooks from the emergency, Jefferson was ready for them.

Instructions were for them to be in a certain room of the White House at a certain hour on Saturday night; and what happened when they got there is another fiction secret not recorded by historians. They didn't know what they were wanted for—the summons hadn't said. A White House attendant admitted them to this ante-chamber where they sat in thirteen chairs named for the first Thirteen States.

Cheroots and brandy were at hand. Snuff for those so disposed, and fried chicken legs from Maryland, walnuts from Carolina, red apples from Maine. A log fire crackled in the fireplace; music tinkled from a music box. Everything was set as though for a party, save that the curtains were heavily drawn, the walls seemed to be in

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shadow, and the room had the atmosphere of a seance—clandestine.

You can see those thirteen early Americans sitting down and looking at each other and wondering. Something was up. What? No one of them knew. They cracked nuts and tried the wine, whispering together, exchanging political gossip. But presently they lapsed into silence.

As the time passed, one or two began to fidget. They adjusted their linen stocks and shifted in their chairs. Coughed and fooled with their garters.

"Demmit!" The Marylander finally displayed his watch. "It's nearly midnight. When is Jefferson coming?"

"What's it all about, anyway?" another exploded, exasperated. "What did the President summon us for? What's in the wind? Why doesn't he come?"

But Thomas Jefferson wasn't coming. He wasn't coming because right at that moment he was watching the room from behind a picture of George Washington on the wall at room's end; watching from the concealment of a compartment built in for just that purpose—such a compartment as he later built over his bed in his bedroom at Monticello.

He was watching the room and studying those thirteen men, wondering which of them were going to pass the test. Test? Listen. Twelve o'clock struck like a curfew. An attendant entered the room and requested those thirteen men to come with him, one at a time, to another chamber. He beckoned the nearest initiate, and the man followed him, wondering what in Uncle Sam was going to happen.

THE attendant led him down a dark-lit hall to a dark-lit chamber, bowed him across the threshhold and closed the door behind his back. It was all very hush-footed and creepful. One candle burned in a corner of that room; the walls were curtained with shadows; and at first our visitor thought himself alone. Then he saw a figure standing back, enshadowed.

He'd expected Thomas Jefferson, but it wasn't Thomas Jefferson. No sir, it was a short, stocky figure in dark cutaway, breeches and hose, standing with back to the room, legs splayed, chin down in thought, head bowed in cocked hat. A gasp from the visitor brought that figure wheeling around. The visitor like to've swallowed his Adams' apple.

"Napoleon!"

You know it wasn't Napoleon. It was an actor—the best character actor Thomas Jefferson had been able to locate on the American stage. This story can't divulge the name, but can bet he was the star of his day.

Night and day for a week, at Jefferson's instruction, he'd been rehearsing for that part, and he looked more like Napoleon than Napoleon himself. His orders were to out-Bonaparte Bonaparte, and he put on a piece of character acting never equaled in the American theater.

That counterfeit Napoleon began by declaring that his troops had invaded America. Armies of grenadiers and *grognons* were concealed in the woods surrounding Washington, waiting to seize the capitol. Jefferson and his cabinet had been kidnapped.

Tomorrow the whole country would be conquered. Therefore (roared this spurious Napoleon) he had sent for thirteen prominent Americans to meet him here in the White House and deliver over the nation.

Well, by the time the bogus Bonaparte got through with that speech, our first initiate's teeth were rattling.

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It all looked very plausible and real. Communication lines were skimpy back around 1802. A fleet could sneak up the Potomac without Boston hearing about it for a week. An army could camp in one valley while the enemy over the hill thought they were five hundred miles away. Even ten years later—to show you how slow information was—the Americans fought a great battle against the British two weeks after peace had been signed in Europe.

So that gag about the French surrounding Washington didn't seem impossible. It explained Napoleon's presence there in the White House. Back in those days the very name of Napoleon was enough to send children hiding in the china closet; and our unsuspecting visitor thought sure he was on the mat before the Little Corporal.

Then that actor let loose the works. He stormed and raved and shouted in a marvelous imitation of Napoleonic wrath. He scowled and struck postures, waved his fists and howled. He threatened to smash America to bits and that man in front of him with it. Ten minutes of that terrific tirade, and that poor visitor's knees were clapping.

Thomas Jefferson, watching from concealment, sadly crossed off a name. He pulled a bell-rope, and the attendant removed the first tryout. Tight-lipped, in an anguish of suspense, Jefferson waited as the second was introduced.

HE DIDN'T blame the four who failed in that first initiation. That actor was good. Once, at a party given by Dolly Madison, he had put on a charade that had scared Jefferson into an indigo funk. That but four out of thirteen failed was sheer tribute to the bravery of the nine who came through that ordeal. Jefferson wondered if he, himself, could have out-faced that actor.

Nine came through the test with colors flying. And one in particular Jefferson had noticed. In the antechamber he had sat off by himself and spoken little; in front of that histrionic Napoleon Bonaparte, he had sat like a rock, immobile, unflinching, granite-lipped, unshaken by that roaring verbal bombardment, never batting an eye.

But if that first test was tough, the second was tougher. Jefferson in his hidden cubicle mopped perspiration from his forehead. He, too, was on trial—on trial for having subjected his fellow Americans to such a test.

Conceive those nine strong men coming out of that conference with that spurious Napoleon, only to be closeted with Talleyrand. Of course it wasn't Talleyrand, but you get the idea. Another actor made up and coached for the part, waiting in a furitive back room with bags of stage-money gold.

Those nine who believed they had outfaced Napoleon Bonaparte found themselves led from the frying pan to the fire. One after another they were conducted to that conference with Talleyrand, and that actor was so convincing that Talleyrand's own mother wouldn't have guessed the difference.

Well, that actor playing Talleyrand was every bit as good as his colleague who'd played Napoleon. He leered and whispered, put his finger alongside his nose and gave his audience the inscrutable smile, the suggestive nudge, the soft-soaped lie and crooked invitation, exactly as the real Talleyrand would have done.

What, he asked each in turn, was the use of further resistance? Napoleon was ready to wipe America off the map; why stick out your neck and fight?

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Democracy was a lot of nonsense, anyway. An emperor was a lot more sensible than a president. An emperor could keep a stupid public in line.

You can imagine this imitation Talleyrand whispering and cajoling and sneaking in the old stale arguments against liberty and personal freedom —the same triple-tongued lies you hear all too often today. And in the end, Talleyrand rattled his moneybags. It would be a whole lot easier, he suggested, for his hearers to sell out than to fight out. Napoleon would pay generously. You can see what a tough test it was for those unsuspecting nine.

It was a mighty tough test. Think of yourself submitted to it. A dark-lit room. Only yourself and a man you believed to be Talleyrand. Nobody listening, you think. The case for your country hopeless, you think. Then that suggestive tinkle of gold. Talleyrand clinkling the gold pieces in smooth, white hands. A yellow gleam in the candlelight. More gold—a whole, glittering bag. Another bag. Another. *Voilà!* half a million dollars! A million dollars! Two million! Three! Four! Five!

It will make you rich for life, my friend. Luxury is yours, security, all the things in the world you could ever want. And no one will ever have to know. No one will ever find out. Just say the word and it's yours. Come, won't you sell out your country for five million dollars?

It took granite-strong Americans to withstand that fabulous, whispered bribery, and there were five men among these citizens who could not, who let themselves be bribed by that bogus Talleyrand. By fool's gold! Yes, five fell down on that test, and Jefferson, watching, must have been pretty desperate. Napoleon and Talleyrand there in the White House were only actors —what would happen when our ambassador came up against the real thing? It was getting close to the end, and Jefferson was sick. Nine names scratched out of a possible thirteen.

But four remained!

Four strong Americans who had withstood the thunderous threats of Napoleon and the bribery of Talleyrand. Four strong Americans who'd refused to quail at danger or sell their country out for gold. And one in particular—a man who, in front of that convincing Talleyrand, had sat like a rock, immobile, granite-lipped, staring straight ahead while five million dollars clinkled in bags at his ear, never batting an eye.

THEN those four remaining Americans who'd survived the courage test and the bribery test were put through the final trial. You can see how thorough Jefferson was. He knew Napoleon was a cunning student of human nature. Fear, gold and women —those are the three most powerful influences in the world, and Napoleon took all the diplomatic tricks when he played them as his trump cards.

Jefferson wasn't taking any chances. A man may be brave as a soldier. He may be brave as a soldier and honorable as Integrity, itself. But when it comes to women! A man may withstand one temptation; he may withstand two, but three in a row are almost too much to ask.

Let's recall our own shortcomings before we criticize the poor fellows who fell before Madame X. Talk about the third degree! The lady who waited for those final contestants wasn't the real Madame X, of course, but she was an A-1 substitute. There's no record of where Jefferson got her, but there were

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some pretty high-voltage charmers in the America of that day—if you don't believe it, read Ben Franklin—and that lady-in-waiting was a Siren with a capital S.

She turned the heat on those four survivors, don't think she didn't. One after another they were ushered into her presence and left to her devices, and her devices were as new as Garbo and as old as Eve. They included subtle perfume and rare champagne; green Egyptian eyes and soft blond curls; a beauty-spot on a marble shoulder, and a gown as revealing as cellophane. Her figure would have troubled an asbestos saint, and she smoothed the worried foreheads of those four early Americans with fingers cool as mint; her voice was emotional as a cello, murmuring promises in their ears.

Lord knows what those promises were, but you can doubt that she was talking about the weather. The weather was pretty sultry around there, too.

You can't blame the three who melted like snow before that siren. Give them credit for surviving tests one and two. Courage and honor had been strained to the limit, and when they staggered into that last unexpected round—well, the miracle was that any man should have survived.

Jefferson, agonized at the sight of melting snowmen, gritted his teeth and clutched his forehead. Those last hopes went down, one, two, three. But one tryout remained. The door was opening to admit the last possibility. Jefferson pulled his eye from the knothole. He wasn't any Peeping Tom.

At the last, he couldn't stand it; he had to leave his post and race to his study and play his violin. His fingers were stiff as if from neuritis, and the fiddle made dismal squeaks. After an eternity the study door inched open. The lady in question was there. Her eyes on Jefferson were amused, her mouth mockingly rueful.

"You can send him to France, Mr. President. I don't know what he's made of, but whatever it is, it won't melt."

So one still remained!

One incredible American who'd refused to quail at danger or sell out his country for gold. That one in particular who'd never flinched before Napoleon—never listened to the bribes of Talleyrand. One amazing man who, with that siren working all her charms, had sat like a rock, immobile, granite-lipped, staring straight ahead while she murmured cello-voiced promises in his ear, never batting an eye.

Then Thomas Jefferson knew he had found his man! With the courage of Richard the Lion Heart; the integrity of George Washington; the invincibility of Sir Galahad—the one man capable of beating Napoleon's triple threat—Jefferson rushed out to take him by the hand.

Even then the man stood before him like cold marble. Convinced by that unassailable expression, Jefferson's heart soared like the American eagle. He wasted no time in words, but handed the man written instructions to buy New Orleans from Napoleon, and gave him the portfolio of American Ambassador to France!

WOULD it work? Would Napoleon fall by his own human nature—trump his own ace? Jefferson, the philosopher, in old brown housecoat and worn carpet slippers, paced the White House floor. Had he guessed aright—that what a conqueror wanted most was power? That to have power, the conqueror must have money? That Napoleon, for all his pomp and panoply, was hard up?

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In the end it wasn't New Orleans he had to buy, but Napoleon. Could Bonaparte be bought? Everything depended on it—the future, the whole history of America. But of one thing Thomas Jefferson was certain. If the deal could be closed, the ambassador he had sent was the one man in America who would close it.

Only then did Jefferson make his last appeal. Not for himself. Not in his own behalf. But for the man he had sent into that spider-web of France.

Fumbling into his pocket, he drew out his Bible—that Bible he had made by clipping out the sayings of the Master from the New Testament and pasting them in a notebook—for which he had been branded a heretic and atheist.

"Lord, grant that he may keep his strength. But if in Thy wisdom Thou shouldst see a lesser destiny for America . . . "

V

NAPOLEON, pacing the floor of the Tuileries, was furious. What to do? This scheme to conquer the American continent was turning into a headache. The campaign in Haiti—that miserable Caribbean pest-hole!—was going badly. Everything was in a *brouhaha.* The army and fleet were standing idle, eating him out of house and home. There must be a conquest. His whole career depended on a succession of conquests; the public was clamoring, and to keep them satisfied he must go out quickly and conquer.

But conquests cost huge sums. Bullets were more expensive than bread—muskets worth more than babies. The army was getting ragged and the generals needed new uniforms. Prices everywhere were going up.

Then that fool minister of the treasury, Barbé-Marbois, had to say the banks were almost empty. *Sacré bleu!* something had to be done. And on top of that the English were getting restless. *Sapristi!* perhaps there was something in this mysterious report that the fool Americans were offering the British an alliance.

Napoleon pulled his forelock in rage. An alliance with the British would be fatal to his plans. Maybe that President Jefferson wasn't so stupid. These swaggering, homespun Americans might fight if once aroused. With the English navy behind them, these miserable squirrel-hunters might be dangerous.

And who was this new American ambassador who sat around the court like a lump of nothing? A farmer, by the looks. Unsociable as a fencepost. A dummy. The man wrote letters and left them around where a one-eyed spy could have found them—letters declaring the Territory of Louisiana was a swamp, a pest-hole, a fever-ridden everglades full of mud and alligators, and flooded twice a month by the Mississippi.

At the same time, he pretendeed the United States wanted to buy this morass. What was the bumpkin's game?

Alors, the dolt couldn't put anything over on Napoleon. Maybe it would be worth while to sell the Americans this swamp. Let them flounder around in this wilderness. Talleyrand was against selling, but Talleyrand was a fool. What did he know about American real-estate?

Besides, the treasury needed the money. Might be enough to start a conquest right here in Europe. Russia, maybe. Or England. *Voilà!* it was an idea. But why did this stupid Yankee want to buy? What did he know? What

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secrets did he have up his sleeve; did Jefferson really have eighty thousand volunteers and a treaty of alliance with England?

The man must be made to talk! The secrets must be wrung from this amateur diplomat! This American must be put through the wringer!

A knock at Napoleon's door.

The Little Corporal whirled, roaring. "Who's there!"

"Sire, it is the American ambassador."

"Send him in!"

DO YOU know that line of poetry about Napoleon: "Cannon his name; cannon his voice, he came"? That is the way Napoleon came down the room on our American ambassador.

A booming bombardment of threats and contumely, warnings and bellowing pronouncements, thundering like the Battle of Austerlitz and all its guns. Cornering our lonely ambassador, he roared and bullyragged and stormed. For twenty minutes his shouts rocked the Place de la Concorde, but throughout all that blast our American ambassador only stood there expressionless, hat in hand, like so much cold marble.

Then Napoleon went into high gear. He banged the desk, bringing his fist down crashing. He rattled his saber till it clanged with the noise of Vulcan's Forge. Stamping up and down the room like the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, he promised to demolish the United States in three weeks, blow Washington sky-high and level all of America with fire and sword.

He squalled at the American ambassador about the cavalry that would over-run America; the fleet that would sink the American shipping in the seas; the armies that would sweep across our plains; the cannons that would knock our Democracy into a cocked hat.

Still the American ambassador only stood there like granite.

Then Napoleon was fit to be tied. He turned black in the face and howled like a jackal. He raged up and down the room, smashing the bric-a-brac and overturning g i l t - l e g g e d furniture. Foaming at the mouth, he fell down screaming and bit the carpet.

All the tricks known to dictators since the breed began, he tried. He bulged the veins in his forehead and popped his eyes; swore like a giant; wept in fury; kicked and squalled like a spoiled baby in a tantrum. But he might as well have saved his breath. Screams, curses, and dire warnings made no more impression on that American Ambassador than beebee shot would have made on the fort at Jena.

At the end, the American Ambassador still stood like granite.

Napoleon, mopping his forehead, sent for Talleyrand.

So our American ambassador was set upon by Talleyrand, and the genuine article (if Talleyrand could ever have been called a genuine article) was nine times more dangerous and intriguing than the imitation had been. Past master at skullduggery was Talleyrand, schooled in the ways of the back-hall camarilla and the double deal; grandfather of much of the cynical, doublecrossing diplomacy of today.

Sly? He was sly as a cat and nine times as deceitful. He advanced on our American ambassador like an alley grimalkin stalking an inexperienced sparrow—in comparison to Talleyrand in court dress, you can imagine our homespun ambassador did resemble an unpretentious sparrow.

Talleyrand was the type who would

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have purred. Here was his dish. He knew Americans. He had journeyed to America in 1794, attempting to clean up a fortune in land speculations. The experience had taught him something. He suspected the true value of the Louisiana Territory, and he thought Napoleon should hang onto it. Also he knew that Americans weren't easily scared. But like most Europeans who judge others by themselves, he thought all Americans would do anything for money.

But the American ambassador to the court of Napoleon was not so easily digestible as our catty Prince Talleyrand had anticipated. The American ambassador, it seemed, was another sort of bird.

TALLEYRAND talked. He talked well. Why, he asked our American ambassador, if New Orleans was a swamp did Jefferson want to buy it? Wouldn't it be better all around if France kept Louisiana?

Surely the Americans weren't suspicious of Napoleon's intentions. In that case they had nothing to fear. The Little Corporal was only teasing. He hadn't meant all those threats. He only meant to send over a few troops to bring civilization to the Indians. *Oui,* at heart he was a missionary. Let France keep Louisiana, and the boundary would never be violated by Napoleon, on Talleyrand's personal oath.

That was a more than convincing speech, and Talleyrand crossed his heart at the end of it. It made about as much impression on our American ambassador as a spatter of raindrops on the Great Stone Face.

Then Talleyrand tried chicanery. Let the American Republic disarm, and Napoleon would disarm, provided, of course, the Americans disarmed first.

Then Talleyrand suggested a treaty —any kind of a treaty so long as the Americans didn't try to buy New Orleans. He was an expert at treaties, Prince Talleyrand. He had held office during the French Revolution, and now he was foreign minister for Napoleon, and later he was going to be minister for the Bourbons. Communist, Fascist and Monarchist in turn, that's how clever he was. He suggested some mighty fine treaties to our American ambassador. Huh! He might as well have been talking to a cigar-store Indian.

Finally he pulled out the moneybags. This time it wasn't stage money, either. It was real gold, ear-marked for just such a job as this, and Talleyrand was an expert at such jobs. Why didn't the American ambassador just go away and forget the whole thing? How about a vacation in Switzerland? An annuity for life. There were two million dollars in those money bags! *Non,* three million. Pardon, *monsieur,* it is four. No answer? All right, then, five!

Five million dollars? For all the response, he might have been offering five million wooden buttons. When he jacked up the pot to ten million, his voice went hoarse as a crow. But Talleyrand's nudges and suggestions our ambassador answered not a word.

You can see the prince shading yellow in consternation. Wiping bilious perspiration from his forehead. Bones of Diogenes! this American was honest. Ah, but nevertheless he was a man. It was time to introduce Madame X!

VI

SHE was draped in diaphanous cerise. Her little slippers were crimson, her fan was scarlet, her lips behind the fan were luscious cherries.

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But her eyes peeping over the fan were blue ponds of innocent wonder, wide as stars under a great Aurora of curly, dark-gold hair. She was wondering when she had beheld so uninteresting a man.

In his sober Republican black, he sat at the sofa's end like wood. His face was wood, and his hand was wood, holding a little gilt-edged card.

The American Ambassador Is Politely Requested to Honor France with His Presence in the Blue Salon of the Tuileries for This Afternoon's Reception. Informal. Tea.

He seemed puzzled by the card as well as the salon. Embarrassed by the pictures. His eye had averted hastily from the bathing beauties painted on the wall, although he could not resist an occasional upward glance at the ladies and the swans floating across the ceiling. Most of the time he stared straight ahead, studiously ignoring the champagne, benedictine and absinthe handy at his elbow.

"Ah, *oui,*" she repeated an introductory explanation, "the court receptions, they are so dull. When I saw you the other night at Josephine's garden party—standing off by yourself, so aloof, so bored, so handsome—ah, I wanted to give a private reception. Just for you."

If he was flattered he did not show it. Merely sighed and tucked the card into his weskit and gave her a meaningless smile. She lowered the fan archly, making a Cupid's-bow of her lips. His smile remained meaningless.

"Tea?" she extended a glass of absinthe in coy humor.

He looked at the glass; shook his head.

"You are tired, *cherie!*" She was deeply solicitous, patting a lace-fringed pink pillow behind his shoulders. "Now then. Now then. Do make yourself comfortable. I know you must be exhausted from your work in the ministry. With me, *cherie,* you can relax."

He nodded, meaninglessly polite, and shifted his shoulders stiffly; then removed the pillow from the small of his back and placed it beside him with an uncordial nod.

Really . . . she caught herself on the verge of a frown; gave him a heart-shaped smile. "La!" She tapped his shoulder with her fan. "I, too, am boring you. How thoughtless of me. I know. You would like me to play the harpsichord."

For twenty minutes she went over her repertoire—soft love songs, crooning ballads, a naughty little thing from *La Grande Armée.* And while she sang the American ambassador sat like an unlovely piece of furniture, his face as blank as a sofa cushion.

She paused, pouting. "Come now, *chéri.* Is it that I play and sing so badly? Here." She patted the harpsichord bench. "Come, sit here beside me." But as he made no move or ready response, she rose from the instrument with something close to a flounce.

Hands on hips in a show of mock anger that came close to being the real thing, she appraised him with cocked head. He met her puzzled frown with steady, disinterested eyes. Truly, this Yankee was a difficult specimen. Was he going to sit all day like a log of wood?

He was scared, that was it. Afraid to open his mouth. Some uncouth frontiersman from the American hinterland, perhaps, frightened wordless by the palatial magnificence of a Paris boudoir; scared to move for fear of knocking over something.

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"Ah, you are afraid of me, *mon brave*. Do not be afraid of little me. See, I am not afraid of you. Look how I trust you, you great handsome American."

Crossing to him with a swish of silk, she seated herself at his feet, rested her cheek against the hand on his knee and gazed up at him with eyes calculated to inspire trust in the most reluctant of men. Brrrrrr! The creature's hand was without feeling.

SHE swung back on her knees like a feline, challenged. So! Here was one of those strong, silent men. *Eh bien,* she had had this type to deal with before. Always they broke down in the end, and in the end they were more violent than the others. She would see about this Puritan. Ha! Seating herself on the sofa beside him, she gave him a look that would have softened the New Year's resolutions of Oliver Cromwell.

"Now, *chéri,* please do not be that way. Let us be friends. Let us be very good friends. I am so lonely since my husband died." Tears glistened in her eyes. "Ah, so very lonely. But my marriage was not happy. *Oui,* I was sixteen and he was old. But all that is in the past. I did not love him, but I miss his companionship. You, here in Paris, you must be lonely, too."

She snuggled against him, and her voice was more than a cello, much more. At the end of that speech it was throbbing like a string quartet. "Is there any reason, *mon ami,* why either of us now should be lonely?"

If there was such a reason, he didn't give it. He sat there in his Republican black like a clam with lockjaw. Stiff-necked. Ramrod-backed. Expressionless. As remote and impersonal as if the lady weren't there.

When she put her head on his shoulder, he made no ordinary response; merely sat like a traveler in the Calais coach, crowded by a stranger. She whispered, purred, made cooing sounds. He examined and picked at a callous on the palm of his had. She skirmished openly, talking in throaty contralto of birds and things—ah, romance, romance in the spring!—slipping an arm behind his back. He stirred uncomfortably; adjusted his cuffs and linen stock; studied a swan on the ceiling.

Then that lady quit skirmishing and got right down to brass tacks. Like her American understudy, she knew all the tricks from Garbo to Eve, but she had some wiles that put her understudy in the shade. Someone will think of Ninon de L'Enclos or Zaza. Madame du Barry or Madame Recamier or Madame Pompadour. Well, Madame X had the lure of all those charmers combined.

Yes sir, she set right out to make history then—the sort of history to be recorded in *The Confessions Of An American Ambassador.* That palace boudoir had been built for just such diplomacy by the wicked Catherine de Medici; some of the most edited *memoirs* in France had come out of that silken room. But they didn't come from our ambassador to the court of Napoleon.

She said, "Come up and see me some time!" and he sat like a basalt carving.

She pulled a bell-cord and from an aperture in the ceiling came the moaning romance of a hundred violins. He stared at the floor.

She knelt at his shoe-buckles, plucking Spanish and Russian love songs from a guitar, songs that would have evaporated the sales resistance of a Trappist monk. He stared at the ceiling.

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SHE sang. Danced. Posed with a rose in her teeth. A mist of desperation dewed her forehead as she asked him to help her pin her shoulder-strap, and he made no move. Then she tried scorn, challenging him with the French equivalent of, "Boy Scout!" She cried, "This is a fine romance! What is the matter with you Americans?"

Sneers did no good; rage seemed equally futile. A fiery French tongue-lashing evoked no more response than a crossing of the knees. She screamed, "Answer me! Answer me!" and he drew out and looked at his watch.

Tears. Great shuddering sobs. "I did not mean it, *chéri.* Ah, *mon brave,* I would not hurt you for the world. I love strong silent men! I love you, *chéri.* You are so handsome — so silent—so strong! From the moment I saw you, I loved you." She was sitting on his knee; murmuring contralto into his ear like a hundred-piece string orchestra. "You are the only man I ever loved—"

Talk about Circe sitting on her rock!

In the wicked palace of Catherine de Medici, courtiers came up the hall on tiptoe; pages peered from behind marble statuary; a lush, diplomatic quiet pervaded the main hall.

This was shattered by an earthquaking bang! As if blown by a cannon, the boudoir doors burst open, knocking Napoleon and Talleyrand head over heels. Pages and courtiers scattered like sheep before the furious figure that rushed out. Confronting the Little Corporal and his minister, the figure made a sculpture of living hate. The face ice-pale. Eyes sunken, black-circled. Hair torn in wild despair. Lips wrenched in fury.

"Out of my way!" She aimed a savage finger at the overturned rulers of France. "Am I to be made a fool of? A jest? You, Bonaparte; you, Talleyrand—I thought you were playing a trick on me! I did not know at first what it was when I entered the boudoir and found that thing waiting for me there.

"It looked like somebody—ah, a good likeness of something human—very good! So I put on my song and dance. It did not move! I sat on its knee. It did not bat an eye! Then I murmured in its ear—such promises—such avowals—such entreaties!

"*Mon dieu!* I said, 'I love you!' — I, Madame X, who have never before found need to ask the love of any man. Not once did it open its lips! *Non,* it sat there granite-lipped, motionless, immobile!

"So I thought it was a dummy, a waxworks, a mechanical statue! I thought it was a joke you idiotic prank-players were trying on me! Ah, I was raging! I wanted to get even. In turn I thought I would put the joke on you!

"*Voilà,* I would change into my riding habit and go to the park as if nothing had happened; I would send Josephine back to entertain this dummy. So I changed, but at the point where I was exactly midway between change of costumes, I found out it wasn't a statue. It spoke! That man! Do you hear me? He spoke!"

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'Madame, what do you think of the Mexican situation'!"

The rest *is* history.

VII

YES sir, it's history for a fact; you can read it in the records in any good library. The famous scene in the Tuileries. Napoleon in his bathtub, and

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the whole court creeping around with the shakes, wondering what the Little Corporal would do now.

A knock at the door.

The valet, Rustin, thrusting in a timid head: "Your brothers are here, Sire."

"Send them in, lump of dirt! Send them in!"

Enter Joseph and Lucien Bonaparte, brothers of the Little Giant whose rise from corporal to conqueror of the World had left them, relatively speaking, down at heel. However, Napoleon had elevated them to jobs of considerable prominence; but working for your big brother is no sinecure, as Joe and Lou continually found out.

"What do you want, you two thickheads! Out with it!"

"Listen, *mon frère,* there is bad trouble. A rumor has it that you are thinking of selling New Orleans to America. The Chamber of Deputies has just sent us here to tell you it is impossible. The French people will not allow you thus to sell the people's territory."

"*Oui,* Napoleon, and what of your plan to conquer the American Continent? You say nothing about your famous plan."

The following is an exact copy of the ensuing conversation, as quoted from Lucien Bonaparte's account.

Napoleon: "Take note, Lucien! I have made up my mind to sell Louisiana to the Americans!"

Lucien: "But it is too unconstitutional!"

Napoleon: "Constitution! Unconstitutional! Republic! National Sovereignty! Great words—fine phrases—but do you think you are still sitting around the Club of St. Maximin? We are past that, you had better believe! *Parbleu!* Unconstitutional! It becomes you well, Sir Knight of the Constitution, to talk that way to me! Go on! Continue, Sir Orator of the Clubs! But at the same time, take note of this, you and Monsieur Joseph, that I shall do just as I please! In fine, I snap my fingers at you and your national representation!"

The above is a precise picture of a dictator behind the scenes, and gives a clue to the people's chances with such a fellow. Reminded of his promise to the King of Spain that he would never sell Louisiana in the first place, Napoleon said the devil fly away with the King of Spain, and it was no time to get fussy over promises.

To quote: "It is certainly worthwhile to sell, when you can, what you are certain to lose. The English, who have seen Louisiana returned to our hands, are aching for a chance to capture it. . . . Our land forces have fought and will fight victoriously against all Europe. But as to the sea, my dear fellow, there we have to lower the flag. . . . America perhaps some day—but I'll not talk of that! The English navy is and long will be too dominant; we shall not equal it!"

For those Americans, in turn, who have quibbled about Jefferson's buying Louisiana without our own constitutional authority, historians point to the emergency indicated by that baleful wish of Napoleon's "America perhaps some day—" Lucky for us we had an acute statesman at the head of our country.

Napoleon was stymied, and he knew it. You can bet he told his precious brothers some things they didn't dare add in their memoirs. Splashing them with oaths and bath-water, he ordered them to fetch Barbé-Marois. To his trembling minister of the treasury he bellowed these historic lines:

"I know the worth of that Territory!

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I have recovered it on paper through some lines in a treaty—eh?—hardly have I done so when I am about to lose it again! But irresolution and deliberation are no longer in season.

"It is not only New Orleans I will sell, but the whole blasted colony without reservation! I direct you to negotiate this affair this very day. Send for the American ambassador! I will sell him the whole confounded Territory of Louisiana for fifty million francs!"

Summoned to close the bargain deal, our American ambassador never altered a muscle of his face.

All he said was: "Put it in writing."

But perhaps that line is apocryphal, like the following anecdote. Talleyrand, apprised of the real-estate deal, rushed to Napoleon in despair.

"What of our conquest, Sire? What of our plan to conquer America? What of the armies waiting idle—the expeditionary force in Haiti—the fleet we are building—the stored-up cannons? What of that new bathtub you ordered sent to New Orleans?"

But Napoleon couldn't answer. He had soap in his eye.

SO HISTORY tells us we bought Louisiana from Napoleon on April 30th, 1803. Arranging that historic transaction, Thomas Jefferson removed such a threat to our country as it has never known before or since.

The ambassador who put over that deal bought a piece of property that ranged from the Gulf of Mexico up the Mississippi to Ohio, and as far west of that as our frontiersmen cared to go squirrel-hunting. The price, all claims included, was sixty million francs. Today we spend about that much on a week of Mardi Gras.

Let's hail that early American ambassador who wouldn't take any graft. And to resume our story, let's conclude with the day when he returned to our shores, beribboned with honors, and Louisiana, so to speak, under his arm.

This story has it that a vast delegation was waiting to meet him on the White House steps. Thomas Jefferson was there; and Madison, our Secretary of State; and James Monroe, who had hurried the money to France; and lots more of our early American forefathers.

As the returning ambassador's carriage came up Pennsylvania Avenue, the whole crowd cheered and roared. The sound was that of all America applauding, but the ambassador never turned his head.

The band broke into *America* as he mounted the White House steps, but the ambassador's features were like carved rock.

Wild shouts of, "Speech! Speech!" rose in tumult as the ambassador handed President Jefferson the deed to Louisiana, but the ambassador took his chair and sat there, granite-lipped, immobile, never batting an eye.

The band became a blare of brass.

A delegate stepped forward, flourishing a scroll.

"To Robert R. Livingston from the people of the United States for his services as ambassador to France, I deliver this speech of congratulations—"

Thomas Jefferson tugged the speaker discreetly by the sleeve. "You can turn off the band. Put the speech in writing."

"Eh? What's that, Mr. President?"

"He can't hear you. He's stone deaf."

AND that's all there is to the story; that last scene, of course, being fictional, too. But the truth *is* stranger than fiction, as an examination of the facts included in this tale ought to prove.

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Take that marvelous versatility of Jefferson's. That scheme of Napoleon's to conquer North America. That bathroom scene between the Little Corporal and his brothers. The fact that there was a Talleyrand, and that Jefferson had the wit to outwit him; that Napoleon *did* sell Louisiana to our ambassador, Robert R. Livingston; the fact that Livingston *was* stone deaf.

It may be drawing the longbow to suggest that Jefferson sent Livingston to Napoleon for that very reason, but the fact remains that Livingston couldn't hear a word of all the threats, lies, blandishments and false promises which Napoleon's court dished out to him; and since everything had to be put in writing—well, who can tell? A pity we don't have more stone-deafness.

So Napoleon took the money and went to Waterloo.

Livingston retired to his estate up the Hudson to help Robert Fulton build steamboats, and live in the peace and quiet of a job well done.

Thomas Jefferson served two administrations as President, and twenty-nine more in our Hall of Fame as the Sage of Monticello, the Philosopher of Christian Justice, the Gentleman from Virginia, the Man of the People. On the Fourth of July, 1826, he joined his old friend John Adams in making his American farewell. They say the firecrackers frightened the angels delegated to meet them at the Pearly Gate—but you can't stop a couple of good patriots on Independence Day!

Bathtub FOR SALE: Twenty-Gallon Capacity—Cast Iron—All Modern Conveniences Including Installed Chair and Charcoal Stove at Foot—Short Size, but Truly Fit for a King—Ye Interested Parties Seeking Magnificent Bargain Please Communicate This Department New Orleans Times-Picayune—1803.

Had you lived in New Orleans in 1803, you might have read such an advertisement in your morning copy of the *Times-Picayune*—had there been an 1803 edition of the *Times-Picayune*.

You didn't live there at that date, and there was no such edition of the *Times-Picayune*, but there was (and still is) such a bathtub. You may see it any time you care to in the old Cabildo Museum down below Canal Street where it remains to this day as a warning to the next war lord or world conqueror who might want to come to America and get up to his neck in hot water.

A fourth novelet in this series, chronicling Imaginary Moments in the lives of America's Presidents, will appear in Argosy soon

Kidneys Must Remove Excess Acids

Help 15 Miles of Kidney Tubes Flush Out Poisonous Waste

If you have an excess of acid waste in your blood, your 15 miles of kidney tubes may be over-worked. These tiny filters and tubes are working day and night to help Nature rid your system of poisonous waste.

When functional kidney disorder permits poisonous matter to remain in the blood, you won't feel well. This may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

If you have trouble with frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning, there may be something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Kidneys may need help the same as bowels, so ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

ADV.

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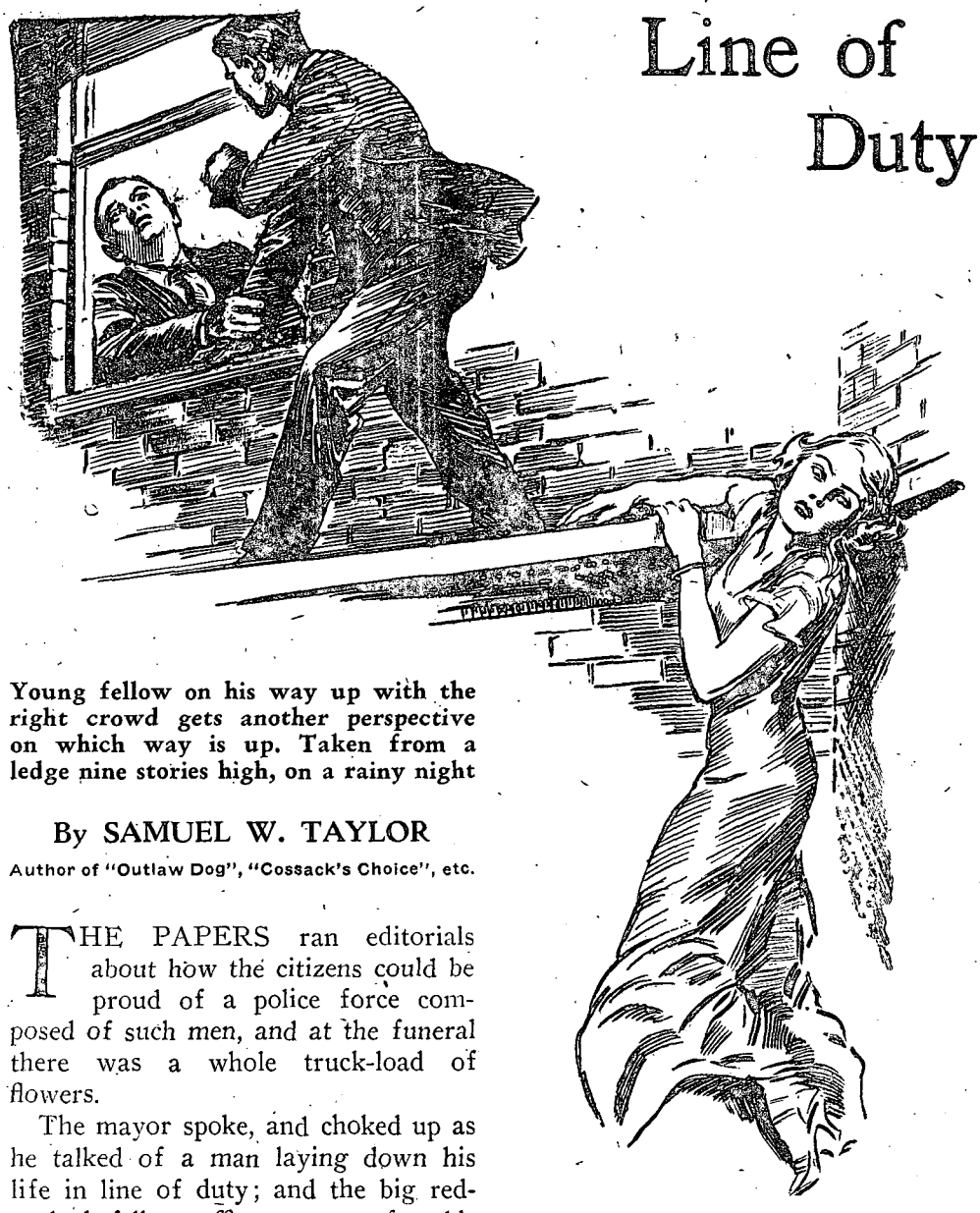
Line of Duty



Young fellow on his way up with the right crowd gets another perspective on which way is up. Taken from a ledge nine stories high, on a rainy night

By SAMUEL W. TAYLOR

Author of "Outlaw Dog", "Cossack's Choice", etc.

THE PAPERS ran editorials about how the citizens could be proud of a police force composed of such men, and at the funeral there was a whole truck-load of flowers.

The mayor spoke, and choked up as he talked of a man laying down his life in line of duty; and the big red-necked fellow officers, uncomfortable in store suits, softly blew their noses.

A week later there was a testimonial dinner at which the widow accepted a medal, and a lot of men took occasion to tell her, "If there's ever anything I can do—" And to her fourteen-year-old son Marshal: "You look a lot like your father, lad."

With one hand over the sill, Marshal hit Big Harry as hard as he could. The man slumped . . .

It was the highest praise Marshal Calhoon could imagine. He felt a fierce pride that in a way helped ease the great emptiness. He and his mother were driven home from the dinner in

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the mayor's car, with a motorcycle escort.

When they were alone in the house, his mother took off her black hat and black gloves and put them away. Then she took the vase of roses and the runner off the cedar chest, opened it and pinned the medal onto the coat of the blue uniform inside.

Then suddenly she was clutching Marshal Calhoon, and all her poise and control of the past ten days was gone. She was sobbing and clinging to him. Finally, when she had cried much of it out of her, she said in a small voice, "It's just you and I from now on, laddie."

He began to understand five months later what he hadn't that night while the medal was glinting and the editorials were fresh and men's voices were saying, "If there's ever anything I can do—"

On this night he sat alone in the waiting room of the hospital. It was almost two in the morning when the doctor came in. The doctor said, "They're both doing nicely. You'd better go get some sleep, son. It's a girl."

During Nora Calhoon's stay in the hospital, Sergeant Sweeney came to visit her. Nobody else connected with the police department came, or sent flowers. The newspapers no doubt slipped up on a good sob story. The happy event was merely listed under "Vital Statistics."

THE pension was thirty dollars a month. When Marshal Calhoon was seventeen, they moved out of the house. Even with the truck stacked high with furniture and bedding and odds and ends, and Sweeney saying, "I believe we got everything," things seemed a bit unreal to Marshal Calhoon.

The white stucco house was something eternal and basic. It was difficult to realize that strangers would be mowing the lawn Sunday morning, using the workbench in the garage, occupying the rooms that were part of his life, planting petunias in the window boxes his father had made, being careful of the tricky hinge on the rear screen door.

His mother was sitting on the running board of the truck in the soft morning sunlight, holding little Nora in a protecting way and looking at the white stucco house. The baby was trying to squirm out of her lap and she ducked her face to the hollow of its neck, holding the child tighter.

The sense of unreality somehow made Marshal Calhoon see her as he never had before: as a man and not as a son. She was slender and attractive. She had dark hair and perfect skin with just a few small growing lines, and her large eyes were beautiful.

"I guess we got everything," Sweeney suggested again. He was pressing tobacco in a curved pipe with a great red thumb. Sergeant Sweeney was a big man, red-faced, deliberate. He was dressed in old clothes, and he'd borrowed one of the city trucks. He'd been a great friend of Marshal's father.

"But maybe," he added, "you'd better take a last look around, and see if we missed anything."

"You go look, Marshal," the mother said quietly.

His feet echoed on the bare floors, and there was a curious sensation of the past. The front part of the house was one long room made into two by an archway. There was a line worn on the wallpaper by the back of his father's big chair, and for a startling instant Marshal could see the big chair

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with the bathrobe over it as a protection against sparks from hand-rolled cigarettes, the muscular figure of his father relaxed in it, shoes off, smoking a hand-rolled cigarette and reading a detective magazine.

There was a mushy spot in the ceiling around the drop chain of the chandelier made when his mother had grabbed and swung on the fixture as she lost her balance tying up a sprig of mistletoe one Christmas. In the wall between kitchen and screen porch there was a hole made when Marshal as a child learned not to play with his father's revolver.

A grease spot on the kitchen wallpaper was the result of his father's dogged conviction he could turn things in the skillet by a flip of the wrist, and there were nail holes in the door where young Marshal had begun fastening a tremendous and complicated device to serve as a burglar alarm.

As he looked in the closet of his mother's room his fingers felt the notches on the inside of the door jamb, where his father had measured the boy's growth every birthday. Marshal was a little amazed to find the last notch came only to his shoulder. That made him remember the uniform. He would be at least tall enough to fit it, now.

IT CAME to him as he went into his own room, with the echoes of his heels booming softly, that he hadn't put the uniform on for some time, now. It'd been kid stuff—or had it?

He'd carefully taken the blue uniform from the cedar chest, removed the mothballs from the folds, and with the coat and hat on stood at attention before the dresser mirror, looking at the shield on the chest and the medal beside it, with his chest full expanded trying to fill out the coat; and always he'd quivered just a little.

His father with a wife and son, and a baby on the way,—but unhesitatingly facing death in the line of duty. Staying in that hallway, blocking the exit of the four killers. He got three of them before they got him.

"We told him to give us an out," the surviving killer snarled on being captured. "We give him his chance. He didn't have to get hurt. Nobody would of been hurt if he'd give us an out."

But he hadn't, and thinking of it always made Marshal Calhoon tremble a little as he stood with his father's blue coat sagging over his shoulders.

Marshal Calhoon went out the front way. His mother and Sweeney were in the truck and little Nora was trying to climb over the door. The bolt made a small harsh *screak* as Marshal turned the key, and only then did reality come. He was outside.

If he was alive we'd still be here. Mother wouldn't be so thin and those lines wouldn't be growing in her face. Everything would be all right if he was alive. The thought drove through him suddenly, leaving him brittle, surprised, resentful. What was he thinking? His father had to do what he did, didn't he? He had to. Didn't he?

"We got everything," he said, and got in the truck.

MARSHAL CALHOON was working from four until midnight at the St. Luke hotel, hopping bells. He'd stretched his age three years to get the job.

"I wish," his mother said one night when he got home, "that you could keep on with your school.' She always waited up for him, and had a light hot lunch ready.

"What's the difference?" He

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grinned. "I've got plenty of schooling for a cop. Sweeney's coaching me. I'll pass okay when I'm old enough."

"But your father wanted you to—You like Dan, don't you?—Sweeney."

"Sure," admitted Marshal. He began on the cream of tomato soup.

"Marshal."

He looked up. His mother was watching a sock she was darning. "Yes?"

"I'd like you to go to school, Marshal. Not just for the education. Perhaps you have enough for a policeman. But it's the young folks you'd associate with, and games and all. Parties and dances. You were doing well with your football and basketball."

"Aw—that."

"You're brave, Marshal. But I know. And you're too young to be working in that hotel. You're growing up too fast, working there." She didn't look up from her darning. "Marshal," she said, "I want to talk to you. He's asked me and I— It's Dan Sweeney. He's a fine man. A good man, and he loves us all."

It was difficult for Marshal Calhoon to speak. "You mean he—you—he—"

"He wants to marry me."

Marshal kept spooning his soup, but he didn't eat any more of it. His mother was saying, "Dan Sweeney is a good man and he loves me. It would make him very happy. He loves us all. It would give you children the right opportunities. I don't like to see you working in that hotel. You're not old enough to be seeing some of the things you're bound to see. Dan Sweeney is a good man . . ."

"Do you," Marshal finally asked, "feel like—well, you know when Dad—I mean about Sweeney—is it the same? Do you feel the same way as when Dad—"

That hurt, he could see. She didn't look up. "You only feel that way once."

Marshal was suddenly on his feet saying, "You can't do that! You're not going to throw yourself—I can make a living!" He flung out of the apartment and went half running down the night streets.

Much later, footsore but still hot inside, he found himself passing the old white stucco house. The lawn was green, the hedge trimmed, and in the dim light from a street lamp on the corner it looked as if the flowers in the window boxes were petunias.

He only had to be brave five minutes. If he lived or died, he'd be a hero either way. But what about us? He got his glory either way, but what about us? He's a hero, but what about us? Who pays for it?

. . . When there was a grand jury investigation a few months later, Marshal Calhoon took it in stride. He remembered another one, years previously. His father pacing the floor and muttering about the black eye a few weaklings could give the force.

"One crooked cop can smear the whole department!" his father had growled.

But now Marshal was bigger and brighter. He didn't feel that old burning resentment. As policemen told the grand jury tales of horse races, gifts, uncanny thrift, mysterious bequests, to explain top-heavy bank balances, Marshal Calhoon stuck his tongue in his cheek. Line of duty! Honor of the force! What did that medal mean, coming from a gang like that? The old man had had guts—sure—but he had been a sap.

BIG HARRY HALL had the 916 suite. All during the grand jury investigation Big Harry Hall's name

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kept coming up. But nothing seemed to come of it.

One evening Big Harry Hall met some people in the lobby and went out leaving his overcoat over a divan. Marshal put the coat away, and took it to 916 when Big Harry returned.

Big Harry Hall felt in the inside breast pocket of the coat, took out a thick wallet, opened it and leafed through it, put it back in the inside breast pocket. He was a heavy man with a heavy square face, good teeth, good eyes.

"You're a chump, kid," he said.

"Maybe not."

Big Harry Hall took the wallet from the pocket, got out a twenty-dollar bill.

"I don't want it."

Big Harry Hall frowned. Then he showed his good teeth. "You can't be that much of a sap. What *do* you want?"

"I don't want to die on this job."

With thick fingers Big Harry Hall put the twenty-dollar bill back in the wallet and put the wallet in the coat pocket. He said, "You're Marty Calhoon's kid, aren't you? Somebody told me."

"Yes."

"And you want to work for me."

"Maybe my old man was a sap. I'm going to get mine."

"I'll think it over, kid."

For the next few weeks some curious things occurred. Things like a stranger whispering something to tell someone, and a second stranger offering a hundred dollars for the information. Things like a beautiful girl being very nice to him and trying to wheedle confirmation to rumors about a certain guest in the hotel.

One night in the elevator, Big Harry Hall said, "I think you'll do, kid," and Marshal Calhoon understood some of the curious events. "The lid's on right now, you understand," Big Harry Hall said. "Just sit tight a little while, kid."

"Thanks."

Sweeney, slow, red-faced, came into the lobby a few nights later. With the shakeup of the investigation, he now was a lieutenant.

"Well, lad, I've got good news," he said. "A place like this is not for a lad like you. I've got you a job with the city recreation department. No more night work. Open air—"

"I like it here."

"And another thing—it's on the city payroll." Dan Sweeney's left eyelid briefly closed. "It won't hurt to be already working for the city when you take the police tests."

"I like it here."

"You can start in the morning. Or if you've got to give notice—best to leave any place with good feelings—".

"I like it here," Marshal said again, sharply. "I don't want your job on the recreation department."

Sweeney asked slowly, "What's into you, lad?"

Marshal shrugged.

"What's the matter? Can't I pick my own jobs?"

"I'm trying to help you, lad."

"Okay; thanks. But I don't want your job. I'm getting wise to myself and I don't — See you around, Sweeney."

The last abruptly as Big Harry Hall came in through the revolving door from the street. Sweeney leaned against a pillar, mechanically filling his curved pipe. He watched the boy get Big Harry's key at the desk, follow Big Harry to the elevator talking and smiling.

"Marty, Marty," the lieutenant muttered aloud. "I'm afraid your boy's getting to be a smart one."

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THE grand jury investigation petered out with three policemen discharged, one indicted, and two on vacations to parts unknown. Big Harry Hall threw a party in celebration. Marshal took supplies up to 916. When he saw the identity of some of the men in the party, he knew he was in. If he wasn't in, he wouldn't be allowed to see that.

"Drink?" Big Harry asked spinning a dollar.

Marshal caught the dollar, shook his head. "On duty."

Big Harry nodded approvingly.

"Aw, come onnie, have a 'ittie drinkie!" A big blonde was coaxing Marshal. She was bigger than the other girls, older, louder, drunker. "Oo's a cute boy, baby. Don't be—"

Big Harry swung her away. She flopped on a sofa and began bawling. Another girl said, "I'm sorry about her, Harry. I made a mistake."

The next time Marshal brought up supplies, the big blonde was out of sight. Big Harry spun a dollar. Marshal caught it.

"Drink?"

"No, thanks. On duty."

A girl ran in from the bedroom. "Bertha! She's going to jump! She says she's going to jump!"

Big Harry Hall muttered an oath. "Go slap that big blonde's face," he growled. "And shut up."

The girl, a redhead in a tight black dress, began trying to shake Big Harry Hall's great frame. "She's going to—She's got the weeps and she says—She's out on that wet ledge!"

Big Harry swept the room with a glance. "Stay here! I said stay here!" he bellowed at the men who began weaving for the bedroom door. And to Marshal: "All right, boy. Give me a hand. You're sober."

Muttering, he led the way into the bedroom. A window was open, and rain was coming in with the wind. "Get out of here," he told the redhead. "And douse the lights as you go. This is a swell mess."

Marshal leaned out the window. The big blonde was crouching on the wet ledge to the left, in the corner made by a buttress column. The ledge was a few feet below the window. It was about eighteen inches wide, of stone, and with a slope to shed the weather. The wind wasn't bad, but the rain was coming steadily. The girl's blond hair was already straggly and the thin dress was moulded to her legs.

"Come on in, Bertha," Big Harry Hall said soothingly. "Come on in, now. You'll be catching cold. This boy will help you get back. Go on, kid."

Marshal put a leg over the window sill.

"Stay there! Stay there or I'll jump!" It was a hysterical scream.

"Shut up!" snarled Big Harry, adding a curse. "Somebody'll spot her if she keeps on yelling," he muttered. "There'll be a bunch of reporters and the cops up here. Take it easy, boy. Try to keep her quiet."

"Harry." A head was at the bedroom door, the face shocked briefly sober, lax and frightened, grotesque in the light coming behind it. "Harry, the boys—if there should be a mess—We figure if anything—"

"Okay. Everybody clear out," Big Harry Hall agreed. The door closed. "Hurry up, kid. Keep her from yelling. I know her kind. A screwball. Too many parties, and getting old. She's doing half of it for attention anyhow. If somebody spots her and she gets a chance to blab to the reporters—Hurry up, kid."

"All right. Let go of me."

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MARSHAL let himself from the window to the sloping wet ledge, and slowly went down to hands and knees. Nine floors down car headlights were moving in the street, and neon lights were reflecting from the pavement.

"Stay back! Stay back!" the girl screamed.

"One more yap," growled Big Harry, "and you'll get pushed off."

"Stay ba—!" The scream suddenly ended. Marshal froze on the ledge. The girl was going over. She was trying to save herself, when it was too late. She was clawing at the wet brick wall.

Everything seemed slow to Marshal Calhoon, crouched on the ledge. The girl made a half turn as she went over the edge. She dropped abruptly, and then somehow she still was there.

She was in the corner of buttress and wall, facing it now, and she'd caught herself by her forearms on the ledge, one arm on either side of the corner. Her face turned to the boy on the ledge, pleadingly.

In that instant, with the curious telepathy of the mob, she had been seen. Voices came from figures that suddenly were at windows of the building across the street, and faces, red from neon lights, were looking up from below. A car had stopped and was shooting up a spotlight.

"Take it easy," Marshal said. "Hang on. I'll get there. Just hang on. Hang on."

"I—don't— Hurry . . ." The girl's voice came from somewhere deep inside her, hoarsely. She was cold sober now.

Big Harry Hall's hand grabbed in Marshal's belt from above. "Kid! Come on back! You can't help her. Come on back!"

"Let go me! You're going to knock me off. Let go me, you fool!"

"Come back, kid. Come on back in. You'll just get pulled over with her. Anyhow, there'll be firemen—"

"Let go me, will you. Let go!"

Marshal crawled backwards, reached up for the sill and came erect. Something was chilling him so that he forgot the height and the wet ledge. Now that the girl was spotted, Big Harry Hall didn't want her saved. He was covering up his party.

"That's right, kid," he was saying. "You can't do anything. You'd be a fool to try. Wait for the firemen—"

With one hand over the sill, Marshal swung the other as a fist as hard as he could. Big Harry was entirely off guard. He slumped half over the sill. Marshal gave him a push backwards, then knelt to the wet ledge again and began crawling towards the girl.

"Hang on, Bertha. Hang on. You can do it. Just hang on. You'll be all right. Hang on, now. Hang on."

She managed, "Hurry." More spots were showing up from the street. Coming through the rain, they didn't give much light. The girl's arms were trembling. She was leaning the upper part of her body into the corner, with her face against the bricks. Marshal reached her.

"Can you hold it? My shoes—"

"A little longer. Hurry." The girl was cold sane, sober, cold normal and utterly scared. She had the desperate courage that comes with facing death. Marshal reached back and pried off his low shoes without unlacing them, peeled his socks.

It was breathless work coming erect with his back against the bricks. He edged along sideways until his left foot touched the girl. He put a hand on the

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surface of the buttress wall for a brace, lifted his left foot over the girl and put it down on the other side of her. Then he was standing above her with his back in the corner.

HE SPREAD his feet along either side of the ledge angle. In the corner, he had some brace. A little. He bent his knees and lowered himself with his back stiff against the corner. It was entirely a question of keeping the center of balance behind his spread feet.

His hands, feeling down alongside his hips, felt her damp hair, the quivering shoulders; then they were on her arms with fingers in the armpits. He tried to raise up, pulling her dead weight. A siren somewhere. Maybe two.

"Don't!"

Her legs became still.

"Don't move. You'll knock us off. Don't try to help yourself."

She wasn't heavy, as weight goes. A hundred and sixty, maybe. But it was limp weight, folding into and resisting the lip of the ledge. It was a question of position and balance.

Balance came first. He slowly came up. Very slowly, worming his shoulders inchingly up the bricks of the corner. His left foot slipped just a trifle. He froze, breathless, tentatively testing it. His big toe could feel the round curve of the ledge lip.

There were many faces now, in the street. Many lights. Black figures were silhouetting windows of the building across the street.

Somebody in a window above Marshal was saying, "Why not? We tie some sheets together and I go down the wall . . ." A woman said, "Now, Jim, don't you be a fool with three drinks."

A siren was dying below. The automobile spotlights became invisible as a searchlight reached up through the rain. A voice yelled something through a megaphone.

Marshal's back was prickling hot with sweat despite the wet bricks. The ticklish part was coming.

"Listen," he muttered. "Do just as I tell you. I'm going to turn you half around. Maybe. When I tell you, then try to get your hands on the ledge and hitch to a sitting position. But not until I tell you. Whatever you do, don't move fast. No matter what. Got it?"

"Yes."

"All right. Can you make it?"

"I think so."

"Can you reach the ledge with your hands?"

"Let me down a little. That's good."

"I'll hold you up. Can you turn yourself just a little more? . . . Easy. . . . Stop; I can't give you any more than that."

"I think I can make it from here."

A long teetering moment. Then she was sitting on the ledge in the corner, and he was spraddled above her. She began to cry. He said, "Don't. You'll get me started."

The firemen helped them in. Marshal needed help. Firemen and policemen and reporters were in the room. Big Harry Hall was saying, "Nice work, kid. Nice work." Big Harry was showing his good teeth, but he wasn't smiling. His eyes were vindictive.

"Nice work, kid," he said, hate in his eyes, showing his good teeth and patting Marshal's back. Marshal was very weak and very confused. All he knew right then was that he felt a bit sick at Big Harry's touching him.

SWEENEY arrived. Big, red-faced, blunt Sweeney. "Not now, not now; leave the lad alone for now," he told reporters. "Talk to Bertha. She'll

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tell you." And he added: "Anything."

He took Marshal along. "Come on, lad. You'd better show up before your mother starts hearing things."

Marshal rode in the back seat of a police car with Sweeney. Marshal's head was whirling. He'd been in with Big Harry, and then hit him. . . . Somehow, he couldn't feel either way about that. He was all confused. He couldn't think.

"You damned young fool," Sweeney was growling beside him. "Bertha! She's been hauled into night court so many times—She ain't worth the coffin she'll be in before long. An old busted-down party girl. . . ."

"I know," Marshal muttered. "Never mind."

"But *you!* Your whole life before you, a widowed mother and a cute little darlin' of a kid sister. . . . What went wrong with you, you young fool? Heroic? Grandstand stuff?"

"I—no; it wasn't—. I don't know. Leave me alone. I just didn't think about anything."

"Sure, you didn't! You didn't think!"

"What's a man going to do?" Marshal flared. "Sit down and start to figure?"

"Headlines, maybe?" Sweeney jeered. "Glory! Pictures in the papers."

"Go fry", Marshal said, but wearily. Then he made another effort to explain: "I just didn't think at all. There it was. A guy has got to do something. Something is there, and you do it. You don't figure anything out. It's just there and you do it."

"Duty?"

"Maybe in a way—" Marshal's words cut off as he realized how softly Dan Sweeney had spoken the word "Duty." He looked at the red face in the dim undulating light of passing street lamps, and then he looked away and his face flushed hot with shame.

"It just calls something inside of you," Dan Sweeney was saying in that soft way. "In a way, your father was a fool. You might've thought that, lad. But you're your father's son. You'll understand now."

Marshal gulped, nodding. He couldn't look at Dan Sweeney. A big red hand gripped Marshal's shoulder. "And when you're old enough for the force—You're already big enough."

"No," said Marshal Calhoon. "I'm not big enough, yet. But I'm hoping to grow. Is that job with the recreation department still open?"

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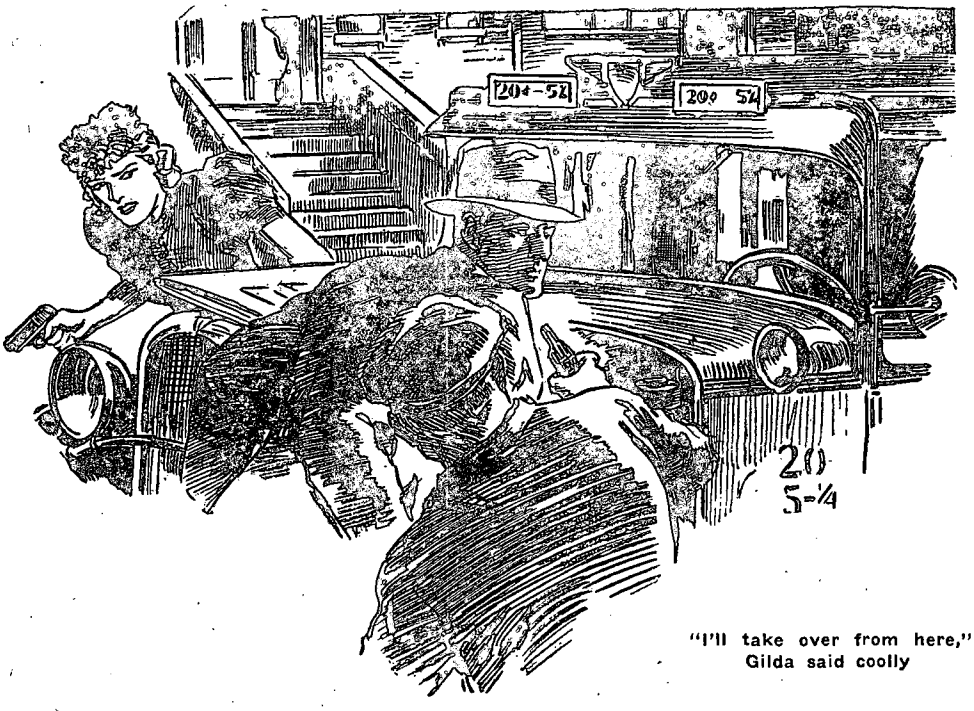

"I'll take over from here," Gilda said coolly

The Sun Sets at 5

By BORDEN CHASE

Don't miss this exciting novel, with Smooth Kyle matching knuckles and bullets with the greatest espionage ring ever uncovered

ON HIS return from Russia, where he has broken up an international counterfeiting operation, SMOOTH KYLE—quick-thinking, lightning-fisted alumnus of Hell's Kitchen, and ex-hackie turned Treasury agent—is handed what his chief, INSPECTOR MCNEARY, predicts will be the toughest case of SMOOTH's hell-for-leather career.

To give SMOOTH a rough idea of what he is up against, MCNEARY takes SMOOTH to a meeting of the German-American Group in Yorkville. Enraged by what he hears, SMOOTH's temper explodes, but MCNEARY gets him away before the riot squad arrives.

SMOOTH meets PROFESSOR STRICKLAND, dry-voiced, scholarly coordinator of the Secret Service, the Treasury Department and the Department of Justice, and STRICKLAND paints an ugly picture of the situation. Vicious though they are, the Groups in the United States are only a cover for an espionage network of colossal proportions. Each of the many spy units takes its orders from one man. All STRICKLAND wants SMOOTH to do is to nail that man and prevent his agents from making off with a newly developed bomb-sight that is just about the most deadly offensive weapon ever invented.

STRICKLAND doesn't regard SMOOTH or his methods with much favor and wishes MCNEARY had assigned a cooler, less inflammable brain to the case. He warns SMOOTH that his habit of thinking with his fists and deciding ties with an automatic won't do on this assignment.

"You're playing with war, young man. War! And the lives of a million American

This story began in last week's Argosy

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soldiers. One mistake will be your last—for it will only take one mistake to set the guns roaring!"

By much persuasion, MCNEARY enlists the aid of GILDA GARLAND, blonde, beautiful and very, very wise. GILDA has loved SMOOTH for years, and for as long has tried to jockey him out of the Department, knowing that she'll have no peace until SMOOTH has quit the field of battle.

"The only reason you can talk me into this," she tells MCNEARY, "is that I'll feel better if I know what Handsome is up to, instead of just sitting around waiting for his body to be delivered at the doorstep."

SMOOTH and GILDA begin their job by putting out feelers at the Club Yvonne, which may be one of the many headquarters of the espionage ring. Particularly interesting to them is MARIE ROUBARD, the Alsatian leader of the club's all-girl band. DAVE HALEY, the Broadway columnist, introduces them to MARIE and SMOOTH goes to work on her. With more zeal, GILDA thinks angrily, than shrewdness.

While still at the club, MARK HESSON, the ex-gambler, begs SMOOTH to help him. HESSON has bought the controlling interest in a line of freighters sailing under British colors. Lately he has been contacted by a man calling himself THOMAS GRAY, and ordered to hold up the sailing of the *Malay Princess* until GRAY gives him word.

"Tell him to take a flying jump at the moon," SMOOTH advises HESSON.

"And land in the electric chair?" HESSON bitterly demands. "I thought you and GILDA were the only ones who knew about that old murder rap. But this GRAY has found out somehow."

"Okay, okay. Do just what he says—but when he gives you the office, don't let the *Princess* leave the harbor until you've tipped me off," SMOOTH says. And HESSON agrees.

HESSON has been told to come to the Club Yvonne every night. And shortly before twelve TONY CARMETTA and three gunmen force HESSON to leave with them. DAVE HALEY thinks he can break up the snatch by broadcasting an alarm on his nightly program. . . .

CHAPTER VI

THE MAGIC VOICE

GILDA waited until Marie had left, then turned to Smooth. "What gives? Is Mark Hesson mixed up in this deal?"

"Up to his neck," said Smooth, "I'll tell you later, gorgeous. Right now I'm anxious to hear what Haley has to say. Go out and tell Jacques Boville to stop the music and turn on the radio. I'll wait here."

Gilda left the table and Smooth watched Marie Roubard step to the orchestra stand. This was one part of the puzzle that didn't fit. Or rather, it was one of many parts that didn't fit.

If Marie was working with the foreign mob, she should have stayed close to Smooth. Never left him. He'd been watching her face when he told Haley this was a government job. It hadn't changed. Perhaps Hesson's snatch had been a surprise. Perhaps it in no way concerned the mob who wanted the bomb-sight.

Smooth doubted it. And now he watched the girl closely.

She spoke to some of the musicians. Chatted for a moment with the girl at the piano and lifted her violin. Smooth couldn't recall the name of the number that was played. It was an old waltz, and Marie played the chorus as a solo, improvising and adding a dozen runs and trills to the music.

Soon Jacques Boville walked to the platform. He spoke with Marie and showed her his watch. She nodded, and the music stopped. Gilda came to the table as the orchestra leader lifted her bow and stepped forward.

"Ladees and gentlemen," she said distinctly. "If you pleese, we will listen to our friend Dave Haley make thee broadcast. It ees said it will be vary interasting tonight. I thank you."

There was a hum of conversation. People turned to look toward the table where Haley had been with his friends. Marie left the orchestra stand. She had just reached the table when the usual station announcement was followed by

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a short commercial. There was silence, and then:

"Good evening, radio listeners of America!" It was Haley's opening line. As always, his voice was crisp and clear. Tonight it held an added note of tension. "This broadcast is directed to the hack drivers of Manhattan. Each and everyone of you! I ask those who are listening to the radios in their cabs to call as many other drivers as they can reach. Tell them to tune in this station! Tell them to listen. It is an opportunity to prove your worth as citizens of the United States! Less than ten minutes ago, Mark Hesson, a former gambler, but now an honest and respected business man, was snatched from the Club Yvonne on Fifty-second Street in New York City!"

THERE was a moment of confusion in the Club. Those at the bar turned quickly to look toward the table where Smooth and Gilda sat facing Marie Roubard. People at more distant tables stood. Some pushed forward. There were questions. A woman screamed and was promptly told to keep quiet.

Haley's voice cut through the confusion, describing Mark Hesson, giving the names of the men who had kidnaped him. Giving their records and a complete description of the gunmen and the clothes they were wearing.

It was a good job, and done with precision.

As Smooth listened his respect for Haley grew. Haley's eye had the properties of a camera—it had caught and held the intimate details of Tony Carmetta's overcoat. The color and manner in which it was cut. The color of his hat and the style. He told of a small scar beneath Nick Sully's left eye. He guessed Mark Hesson's height to the inch and said Hesson would be with Sully and Carmetta. He said they had left the Club in a cream-colored cab and gave the make of the car.

"How did he know that?" asked Gilda quickly.

"Riley, the doorman, I guess," said Smooth. "Too bad he didn't get the number."

"That wouldn't help. They'll switch before they go ten blocks."

Haley's voice went on, spreading the alarm and giving estimates of the distance covered by the cab. He finished by warning that these were dangerous men engaged in a crime that was directed against the Government. He urged the cab drivers to check every car on the street and call an officer if they saw men answering to these descriptions.

He appealed to the guards at the toll stations of the bridges and tunnels, to garage attendants and the men in gas stations. With his words, he drew a net around Manhattan Island and finished by saying: "Get these men! This is your duty! Your duty as citizens!"

It was more than dramatic. Haley's voice had a quality that sent chills racing along your spine. It hammered at you. As Smooth listened he could imagine the reactions of the hackmen. One calling to another. Passing the message. Spreading it through the streets and avenues faster than any car could travel.

Somewhere, Nick Sully and Tony Carmetta were holding guns against Mark Hesson's ribs while their cab driver got the message from the driver of another hack. Perhaps the radio was going in their own rig. Smooth grinned at the thought.

Jacques Boville came to the table when the broadcast was finished. At his side was Frederick, the headwaiter. Jacques asked questions. He demanded

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explanations. Frederick was outraged. The reputation of the Club Yvonne was gone forever! Ruined!

"Settle down," said Smooth easily. He pointed a finger at Frederick. "I gave an order for some food about twenty minutes ago. Where is it?"

"Food?" said Frederick. His eyebrows lifted and he struggled for composure. "In this excitement, sir—this confusion. I—"

"Never mind the confusion," said Smooth. "Get my order and make it fast." He pointed to a chair and grinned at Jacques Boville. "Sit down and stop pretending. This is the best break your club ever got. A million dollars worth of publicity, and you know it."

"But it ees vary bad publicity!" said Jacques. "It ees publicity that keeps my vary bast patrons away!"

"So what?" said Smooth. "You'll get a thousand others. And while we're waiting for them to come, suppose you tell me what you know about Mark Hesson."

"Monsieur Hesson?" Jacques shrugged his shoulders in an eloquest gesture. "Notheeng, except he comes to my establishment every night lately. But every night! More than that I do not know!"

"Does he come alone?"

"Yes. Always! He leaves about midnight."

"Good enough," said Smooth. "I see Frederick finally dug up something for us to eat. You better run along and tell your customers everything is under control."

GRADUALLY the tension lessened. Jacques went from one table to another, chatting with the guests and assuring them Mr. Hesson would not be harmed. Marie Roubard devoted her entire attention to Smooth. Her questions were those that might have been asked by any entertainer under the circumstances. She was asking if Smooth had known Hesson during Prohibition, or some such thing, when Dave Haley returned. He walked quickly to the table.

"Like it?" he asked.

"Not bad," said Smooth.

"Would you like to make a little bet on the results?"

"What's your guess?"

"That Mark Hesson will be released, or the police will grab Braden, Shultz, Carmetta and Sully within two hours."

"I'd be a sucker to bet against that."

"Why?"

"Because Mark Hesson is checking his hat in the lobby right now."

"*What?*" cried Haley. He turned quickly. Then he laughed. "Wonderful thing, radio. I really think it's here to stay."

The eyes of each guest in the Club Yvonne followed Mark Hesson as he walked across the room. No one spoke to him. Almost, it was as though they awaited some official announcement that the man was real. Another broadcast, perhaps. Anything.

Many who knew Dave Haley started toward the table. Then they stopped and formed into small groups. A woman said, "Just a publicity stunt."

Hesson said nothing until he reached the table. There was an amused and quizzical expression on his face. He picked up a glass of water. Sipped from it and put it down. Then he lit a cigarette.

"Much obliged, Haley," he said quietly. "Maybe I'll be able to do you a favor sometime."

"Nuts with that!" said Haley. "Talk, man! Let's have it! What happened, and how come you're back here?"

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"Why not?" said Hesson. "You're a newspaper man. I figured you'd want first crack at the story. I owe you that much, anyway."

"Yes, yes, yes!" said Haley impatiently. "But what—*what?*"

"Nothing much. Carmetta and Sully walked me out of here and we got into a cab. The guy behind the wheel didn't look like a hackman but I couldn't see enough of his face to recognize him. Probably one of Carmetta's crowd, and the hack was stolen."

"Where did they take you?" asked Haley.

"Over to Park Avenue and then north. We turned left at Ninety-sixth and stopped for a light at Madison. Sully remembered your broadcast was about due—in fact, he told Carmetta he always caught you when you spoke. He turned on the radio and almost did a nipup."

"You mean they actually heard that broadcast?"

"Sure. So did I. And, Dave, you'll never know how close that came to being my last radio program."

"Why?"

Hesson laughed. "Carmetta realized I was too hot to handle. He was high as a kite and ready to try anything. His first idea was to bump me. He stuck his gun in my stomach and I started to wonder what it was like in Hell. Then Sully grabbed him. He talked fast and convinced Carmetta there was no point in adding a murder rap to the job." Hesson turned to Smooth and his grin was wise. "I guess you know how I was feeling by that time, Smooth."

"I've got a pretty good idea," laughed Smooth. "Me—I'd have been trying to remember a prayer. But fast!"

"Check," said Hesson. He turned back to Haley. "They talked for a minute and figured the payoff. I was to be delivered to a man in Yonkers, where they were to get paid for the job. The broadcast turned that sour but Sully had an angle. He told Carmetta to toss me out at the next light, they'd split and take separate cabs. They'd go to the drop and collect. And that was that." "I don't get it," said Haley. He was making quick notes on the back of an envelope. "How did they figure to collect if they didn't deliver you?"

"The same way they collected me," said Hesson. "The payoff man would have the money. He'd be expecting them. He'd be expecting me, too. Instead, he'd get a few slugs in the chest and Carmetta would grab the money."

"Did you notify the police?"

"Why? It's not going to hurt my feelings if Carmetta kills the chump. Besides, the cops will be here to question you. I knew that, so when Sully and Carmetta tossed me out of the cab, I hired another and—well, here I am."

Smooth leaned forward. "Did they mention any names, Mark?"

"None at all."

"That Yonkers gag was probably a phoney. Chances are they're heading for Brooklyn."

"Probably. Carmetta knows his way around. So does Sully."

Haley pushed back his chair. "You're sure that's all the information you have?"

"That's all."

The columnist turned to Smooth. "You made a crack about this being a Government setup. Can you tell me any more about that?"

"Not just yet," said Smooth. "But if you want to string along I'll promise you first crack at the story when it breaks."

"I can depend on that?"

"Yes. And that goes for Mark, too. Neither of us will give the story to any-

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one but you, Haley. Is that fair enough?"

"Suits me," said Haley. He put his hand on Hesson's shoulder and talked fast. "I'm going to try to beat the deadline with this. Stay here until the cops arrive. Tell them what you have to, but give me a break with anything good that develops." He turned to Smooth. "I'll be back in an hour. Wait for me here."

"That's a deal," said Smooth.

CHAPTER VII

INVITATION TO A WALTZ

HALEY ran toward the door. He reached the checkroom as two detectives came from the street. One grabbed his arm. Haley laughed and pointed toward the table. He spoke to the detective quickly, motioned to the man's partner and left the Club Yvonne. Frederick, the headwaiter, had been standing with Jacques Boville at the table. Both of them seemed worried. There were a few whispered words and Jacques nodded. He bent forward to talk with Hesson.

"If you please, *monsieur,*" he said quietly. "It ees vary bad, all of thees. Vary bad for my restaurant. Could you leave please, before there ees more excitement?"

Hesson grinned. "Don't let it throw you, Jacques. Detective Silverman will take care of that." Hesson winked at Smooth and stood up as the detective crossed the room toward him. "I'll be at the Forty-seventh Street house for the next few hours if you want me. Personally, I think I'm going to enjoy it. This will be the first time I've been on the right side of an arrest. Be seeing you, feller."

Smooth nodded as Detective Silverman came to the table and stood beside the ex-gambler. He knew Silverman—one of the smartest men in the midtown district. He passed a quick wink to the puzzled detective.

"Mark will give you the story on the way to the house," he said quietly. "You can take my word it's on the level."

"Yeah," said Silverman. "I can take your word." He nodded to Hesson. "Let's go, Mark. Glad to see you're still in one piece."

They left the club and Smooth rested his arms on the table. Anything might happen in this place. Anything. Strickland and the crowd at the Customs House had been right when they called this case a tough one.

IT WAS after midnight when Dave Haley returned to the Club Yvonne. His story was in and the late editions of his newspaper were spreading it across the country. The usual Haley luck had held good and he'd come through with a beat. He ordered wine and played the host. No questions. Haley was smart enough to know they wouldn't be answered.

Instead, he chatted with Gilda. Danced with her and made himself agreeable. Smooth talked with Marie Roubard whenever she could leave the orchestra stand. And he learned exactly nothing.

Soon Jacques Boville came to sit with them. His manner had changed and he was beaming. Telephone reservations were coming in by the dozen. The Club Yvonne was the place to go. It was wonderful. Smooth was wonderful. Dave Haley was wonderful. Everything was wonderful!

And then Nadja Sherene came in.

Smooth saw her first, standing under the arch of the doorway like some silent figure in a religious spectacle. Her cape was white and severe

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in its lines. A monk's cape. A pointed hood drawn forward over her chestnut brown hair. Her only jewel was a deep-hued ruby that hung from a slender silver chain at her throat.

There was a murmur. Women whispered the name—Nadja Sherene. Men looked. Lifted their eyebrows and looked again. A press photographer came into the room. He pointed his camera. A flash bulb flared. Frederick hurried forward. He bowed. He spoke to Nadja Sherene and then to her escort—a short round man who appeared very proud of himself.

"Not bad," said Smooth.

"Not good, either," said Gilda quietly.

Dave Haley grinned and turned to look at Smooth. "Surely you've heard of Nadja Sherene," he said. "She's Hollywood's latest gift to the world. A Viennese. Quite a history I'm told. She was tried and found guilty of treason, sentenced to the block but escaped. Her first picture went over big and now she's competing with Garbo, Dietrich, Massey and the rest."

Nadja Sherene was coming toward them. Her chin was high and she looked neither to right nor left. It was an act, but a good one. Her steps were slow. Measured. Making an entrance.

"Hello, Nadja," said Haley. He waved a careless hand.

The girl in white stopped. "Ah, Dave, my dear!" Her voice was a low contralto. "So nice to find you here. I'd been hoping for a few words with you."

"Why not join us?"

Nadja smiled slowly. "But of course!" Her head turned slightly toward the short round man. "We will sit here, Herman."

"But Nadja, we were to meet—" Herman was bewildered.

"We will sit here," said Nadja again.

Introductions took but a moment. Dave Haley ordered another bottle of wine. Two bottles of wine.

Smooth saw Gilda measuring the new star. He watched Gilda's eyes take in each detail of the white cape and the severely plain dress beneath it. Almost, it was as though he were watching two fighters move out of their corners in the first round of a championship bout. Nadja got over the first punch after a moment of conversation with Haley.

"Dave tells me you have a shop," she said to Gilda. "I must stop in some time and see if you have anything that amuses me."

"Not this week," said Gilda. "Better wait until next."

"Next week? Why then?"

"I'm expecting some new models. The ones I have now are perhaps a shade—youthful, I'm afraid."

Smooth leaned close to Gilda. "Nice footwork, beautiful. Now cross with your right and it's in the bag."

Gilda stepped on his toe. She smiled at Nadja and turned to talk with Dave Haley. The screen star tried again. This time she made her play through Smooth. She had heard of him. Read of the things he had done. She had always wanted to meet a man who led an exciting life. Would Smooth tell her about some of his cases?

Smooth would—but not tonight. Gilda took care of that. She steered the conversation along other channels, careful to put Nadja at a disadvantage whenever possible. Smooth enjoyed the fight. He noticed Dave Haley was enjoying it, too. Nadja was clever. And she was an actress. She was used to being the center of attention and meant to dominate the group at the table.

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GILDA'S attitude puzzled Smooth. Because she was a woman and beautiful it was natural for other women to lead an attack against her. Ordinarily Gilda took this in her stride. She knew the answers. Knew how to handle a situation. For a time she might spar with words, but soon the other woman found herself liking Gilda in spite of everything.

He waited for Gilda to make some casual remark that would lessen the tension. It didn't come. Instead, Gilda used every turn of the conversation to put Nadja Sherene at a disadvantage. Dave Haley mentioned Nadja's first picture in which the foreign star had been introduced to the public as an exotic creature of glamour. He asked Gilda if she enjoyed it.

"Very much," said Gilda casually. "The acting was fine but the direction was stupid. Why do they let Miss Sherene imitate Marlene Dietrich? It doesn't make sense. That sort of thing is natural to Dietrich. Besides—she's an actress."

"And you don't consider me an actress?" asked Nadja evenly.

"I haven't had the opportunity to judge."

"Not yet—but you may soon."

"I'll wait."

"Please do," said Nadja. She turned again to Smooth. "Have you ever been to Europe, Mr. Kyle? Vienna, perhaps?"

"I was there about a month ago."

"Really? And has it changed? Have those terrible Germans left anything of the soul of the city?"

"I'm not much of an authority on souls. But it did seem as though the city were hiding under a mask. On the surface there was a swastika—underneath, there was a knife."

Nadja's eyes grew bright. She leaned forward, rested her hand upon Smooth's arm. "Then there is still hope! Some day Austria will rise again and throw off this tyrant! Vienna—my Vienna will lead the way!"

"Perhaps," said Smooth.

"It must be." Nadja lifted her eyes toward the low ceiling of the Club Yvonne. "If there were some way I could help. There is nothing I would not attempt. No sacrifice would be too great."

"Personally, I like Greenpoint," said Gilda quietly.

Dave Haley laughed. So did Smooth. He had to. What might have been a dramatic moment had turned into a farce. Nadja did her best. She smiled and lifted one rounded shoulder in dismissal. Her escort frowned at Gilda. He stood and asked Nadja if he might have the pleasure of the next dance. Nadja agreed as Marie Roubard stepped forward on the orchestra stand to conduct the number.

"You're a great help," said Smooth quietly.

"I don't like her," answered Gilda.

"Who do you like?"

"Me!"

Dave Haley smiled. "So do I, Gilda. Some of these recent importations are beginning to get me down. They get tossed out of a country and spend the rest of their lives trying to convince everyone that it was a great place. If she went back to Vienna she'd probably write a book about Americans and call them barbarians." He turned to Smooth. "Do you agree with me?"

"No," said Smooth. "I think she's very nice."

"Oh, Nadja's all right," said Haley. His grin was tolerant. "It's her attitude that bothers me. That European superiority. Hokum, I call it. What has Europe got that you can't find here?"

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"A war," said Smooth shortly. He glanced at Gilda. "How's about another dance, beautiful?"

"Let's don't and say we did."

Smooth frowned. "Why the peeve? Something bothering you?"

"You are," said Gilda. "You've been sitting there for the past five minutes looking at Nadja Sherene as though she were something you'd found on your Christmas tree. Would you like to be alone with her, handsome?"

Smooth blinked. This wasn't the old Gilda. Something had changed. Her poise was gone, and her suavity. She was acting like a school girl. The last thing he expected from Gilda was jealousy—or at least, he had never expected her to show it. Now she was angry, and she was taking no pains to hide it. When the orchestra stopped playing she glanced quickly at her wrist watch.

"Time to go," she said abruptly. "Nice to have seen you all. Come along, Smooth."

"So soon?"

Nadja reached across the table and put her slim hand on Smooth's. "You must give me an opportunity to talk with you again," she said softly. "Some time when there are not so many—" she smiled sweetly— "interruptions. Shall we say next Friday evening at my home?"

"Why not?"

"Splendid," said Nadja. She opened her white purse and gave Smooth a small card. "Call me in the afternoon. I'll be expecting you."

Smooth asked for the check but Dave Haley protested. It was his party, he insisted. The short round man who had come with Nadja also protested. It was *his* party. Smooth shrugged. He shook hands and followed Gilda out. Jacques Boville walked with him. The restaurateur hoped Smooth would call soon again. And, he whispered, Marie Roubard had instructed him to give the same message—privately.

He opened the door and Smooth walked with Gilda toward the curb. Riley, the doorman, hurried toward them. He bowed to Gilda and stepped close to Smooth.

"Watch it, pal," he said quietly. "The guy on the front cab paid a pound for first out."

"Who is he?"

"A new one."

"Thanks."

Smooth slipped a folded bill into Riley's hand. The cab was waiting and the door was open. Gilda stepped in. Smooth looked at the driver.

"Over to Broadway and around Times Square," he said. "No hurry."

CHAPTER VIII

BY ORDER OF CENTER

HE STEPPED inside and Riley shut the door. The forward window was down and Smooth asked the driver to close it. When the glass slid into place he leaned back and yawned.

"A fine romance," said Gilda.

"Sorry. I'm all in."

"Then why Times Square? I live on Madison and Sixty-third."

"So I've heard," said Smooth. "But I though we might go to a safe place while I guess why any hackman would spend five dollars for a call."

"Say it again and explain as you go."

Smooth pointed over his shoulder. "Riley—the doorman at the Club Yvonne. Used to be a pal of mine. He tipped me the driver had paid five dollars for first place in the line."

"Why?"

"Your guess is as good as mine."

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Gilda opened her silver case and took out a cigarette. Smooth reached into his coat pocket for matches. Gilda shook her head. She leaned forward and tapped against the window.

"Have you a match, driver?"

"Yeah," said the hackman. He lowered the glass and passed a box over his shoulder. "You can keep 'em, lady."

"Thank you," said Gilda. She leaned back against the cushion, lit her cigarette and offered one to Smooth. "I meant to ask you, dear," she said clearly, "is the Treasury Department still working on that Los Angeles narcotic case?"

"Is the which working on who?" said Smooth. He blinked.

"Oh, don't worry about me." Gilda's heel searched for Smith's toe on the floor of the cab. "I won't repeat anything you tell me. Not for the world. But I was just wondering if it was the Los Angeles case that brought you to New York."

"Oh, sure—sure," said Smooth. "I heard Wong Fu was trying to smuggle hashish into New York on dog sleds. Well, once I knew that, everything was easy. I borrowed Silver from the Lone Ranger and galloped right into town. I met Wang Fu, bought the dogs and that closed the case. Elemental, Watson. Very elemental!"

"Ape!" whispered Gilda.

"That's another one of my names," said Smooth. He leaned back on the cushion and put his lips close to Gilda's ear. "Never try to work a line like that on a hackman, Angel. Any guy smart enough to shove a hack in New York is too smart to go for the old run-around. Don't forget—I used to push one of these things."

"May be you should have stayed on it," said Gilda softly.

The cab reached Broadway and turned south toward the glaring lights of Times Square. Smooth studied the back of the driver's head. Watched the way he handled the wheel. He was new at the trade. A peculiar ease that comes to old-time hackmen was missing. He was nervous, too. Smooth noticed they had passed a red light at one of the intersections. No need for that. The man's mind wasn't on his driving.

They passed the Astor, turned east at Fortieth Street and followed the hour-glass outline of Times Square. Twice around and Smooth leaned forward to give the driver Gilda's address. The cab reached Madison Avenue, turned north and stopped before a modern apartment. Smooth reached for the door.

"Don't bother," said Gilda. "I've decided not to go home just yet."

"What then?"

"Almost anything. A drive in the Park or—"

"Sorry but I've got an appointment with McNeary. Mustn't keep him waiting. Hop out and I'll phone you in the morning."

"Oh, that's so," said Gilda quickly. "McNeary did say he wanted to see you."

"Of course."

"And he wanted to see me, too. I'll come along with you."

"This is getting very complicated, beautiful," said Smooth slowly. He put a firm hand on Gilda's elbow. "Be a nice girl and bounce up to bed or—"

"Or what?"

Smooth let go of her elbow. He looked up through the skylight in the cab roof at the stars that were spread across the Manhattan night. They didn't offer any help. Nor suggestions. He motioned to the driver and leaned back in the seat.

"Over to First Avenue and uptown,"

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he said. "And close that window. It's cold!"

THE window went up and the cab rolled. Smooth opened the top button of his blue double-breasted coat and loosened the gun in its leather. He looked at Gilda's black purse and saw she had unfastened the clasp. He put his hand on the dull cloth. Felt the hard outlines of a small automatic. He sighed and shook his head.

"What made you think you could deal me out?" she asked.

"You know why we're heading over to First Avenue?"

"Naturally."

"Don't you think I can handle it alone?"

"Curious, that's all."

Smooth gave up. He watched the street lights slip past as the cab rolled toward a darker section of town. Traffic had thinned and the driver was making good time. Smooth saw him lean forward. The motor coughed. Missed and grabbed again.

"It won't be long," said Smooth.

The cab slowed its pace. A dark loft building was just ahead. The driver swung the wheel and the car stopped.

"Something wrong?" called Smooth.

"Yeah—trouble with the spark. I can fix it quick, though."

"Take your time."

The driver moved out from behind the wheel. He lifted the hood an examined the motor. Then he walked to the door and opened it.

"Guess I'll have to ask you to get out," he said. "My tool kit is under the back seat."

"Fair enough," said Smooth. He motioned to Gilda. "Come on, gorgeous. Climb out and let the man work."

They stepped to the curb and the driver rummaged under the rear seat. In a moment he went forward to the motor and there was the sound of metal on metal.

"Hey, mister," he said, and beckoned. "Maybe you could hold this wire for me? I only got two hands and this job needs three."

"Why not?" said Smooth.

He walked to the front of the cab and glanced in at the motor. It was a much nicer job than they had built into the old crates. But it still ran on gas and spark and even a new motor won't run when the distributor wire is unhooked.

"Which wire do you want me to hold?" asked Smooth.

"That one in the middle—right there."

"Oh, this one?" Smooth picked up the wire with his left hand and leaned over the motor. "What's wrong?"

The hackman stepped back. His hand went to his coat pocket and he braced his feet. Smooth wondered what Professor Strickland would say when he heard there had been another unfortunate accident. Too bad. But you couldn't argue with a man who had a gun in his hand. Not if you wanted to keep healthy. Smooth went for his own gun.

"I'll take it from here," said Gilda. "Hold that pose—both of you!"

"GOTT!" said the hackman. He looked over the motor at the small automatic. It was rock steady. So was the girl who held it. The hackman drew a deep breath. "What is it—a stickup?"

"Something like that," said Gilda. She winked at Smooth. "Take his gun, handsome. Patch up the crate and climb behind the wheel. I'll take care of Fritz."

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"Always belittlin'," said Smooth. There was disgust in his tone. "Why didn't you stay put, beautiful? We'd have had one less to worry about."

"Just as big a chump as always, aren't you?" Gilda motioned toward the driver's seat. "Climb in and let's roll."

She nudged the hackman with her gun and pointed toward the rear door. The hackman moved. He stepped into the cab and Gilda followed. Smooth replaced the wires, closed the hood and sat behind the wheel.

"Where to, lady?"

"Home, James. Fritz is going to tell us everything we want to know. Aren't you, Fritz?" The man moaned.

Smooth touched the starter button and swung the wheel. He drove south along First Avenue and stepped hard on the gas. Not a bad rig, this. Plenty of pickup. A good deal different from the old bucker's rigs Smooth had known. Those were tough crates. Four cylinders and plenty of southern exposure. Smooth figured the new crop of hackmen might be getting soft. Gilda, too. A few years ago she would have let that driver have it right between the eyes. Or would she? Gilda always thought before she pulled a trigger. Perhaps hers was the right way.

He turned west toward Madison Avenue. Suddenly he heard Gilda's knuckles rapping against the glass partition. He stepped down on the brake. "What's wrong?" He was out of the seat and standing at the door, one hand at the opening of his coat.

"Get in, close the door and look at Fritz."

Smooth whistled. He closed the door behind him and looked at the driver who was slumped down in the corner of the seat. The man's eyes were open but Smooth knew death when he saw it.

"How come?"

"Poison, I think," said Gilda. "He was nervous and asked if he could chew some gum. Like a fool I let him. Two minutes later he folded up."

"Did he say anything before he checked out?"

"Nothing—only the question about the gum."

Smooth frowned. "It doesn't make sense. Even a two-bit gun-slinger would have made a try for it."

"I know it," said Gilda. "And for the first time in my life I'm—frightened!"

"About what?"

Gilda pointed toward the still figure beside her. "He wasn't just a gunman, Smooth. Not like Carmetta and Sully. That kind don't commit suicide. This man was working for something more important than money. He didn't know what we were going to do with him, but he did know we were all playing in the same game."

"So?"

"He knows the rules of that game—anything goes. Even torture."

"Be nice! That stuff doesn't happen in this country."

"We know that—but maybe he didn't. Maybe he was trained in a country where it was part of the routine. He was afraid he'd talk—say things that would help us. He wrapped it up, instead."

SMOOTH was listening but his hands were busy while Gilda talked. The driver's pockets yielded a few small bills, a wallet, some change and two keys. He opened the wallet. The license gave the man's name as William Smith. Smooth smiled. He dipped into the coat pocket. No letters. Nothing

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but a folded square of white cardboard. It was a menu from the Club Yvonne.

"Maybe I'm crazy," said Smooth. He handed it to Gilda.

"Maybe we're all crazy," said Gilda. She looked at the menu. "The turtle soup is checked, coffee, snails—that's all. No message on it."

She passed it back to Smooth. He finished his search and shook his head. "Guess that's all. Willie wasn't carrying anything that might get him in trouble—except a gun."

"Who tipped him about you?"

"Someone in the Club Yvonne, of course."

"Marie Roubard?"

"How? She didn't leave the club while we were there."

"Perhaps she told a waiter and he passed it along."

"That might be, but I doubt it."

"What about that menu?"

"Yeah—what about it?"

"Think hard, handsome. The answer is there if you can guess it."

"I never did like riddles," said Smooth slowly. He looked again at the menu. Ran his finger along the margin. Suddenly he laughed. "So that's it, eh? Smart people—very smart!"

"Who?"

Smooth handed her the menu. "Read it yourself, gorgeous. It's all there. Brief, but to the point. It says, 'Number Six will kill Kyle, the man in the blue suit at table four. Order of Center'."

Gilda blinked and shook her head. "Maybe it was the champagne. Are you sure you're not seeing double?"

"Run your finger along the edge."

"Just a lot of little bumps."

"Braille—a sentence in Braille. The first set of three bumps, like a colon with an extra dot at the top—that means the number six. It could mean the letter *F*, or an exclamation point, or the word *from*. The next set—three upright dots with one before them—that means *will*. It's a word sign. So are the others that follow."

"When did you learn to read Braille?"

"McNeary made me learn. Said it was part of my job and I guess he was right."

"He's usually right about most things," said Gilda slowly. "He said this was your hardest case—that you'd need more than luck to break it. I agree with him, Smooth."

"So do I. But a little luck doesn't hurt, and meeting Mark Hesson was a break."

"What did he tell you before he was picked up?"

SMOOTH told of Hesson's problem—of the visit from Thomas Gray and his orders about the *Malay Princess*. Gilda listened, asking an occasional question as Smooth hurried through the story. When he had finished she sat quietly for a moment, thinking.

Madison Avenue was almost deserted but at times a pedestrian passed along the quiet street. Smooth had seated himself next to the driver, partially screening the man's body from view. Death wasn't new to him, nor to Gilda, either. Both had lived too close to it for the past few years to find its presence uncomfortable.

"Let's add this up and see what we get," said Gilda at length. "We know that a clever agent is working in this country. He has plenty of money with which to operate and a group of fanatics to do his odd jobs. He's after a bomb-sight and he's been trying to grab the plans. There's a leak at Washington and the Secret Service can't plug it. Then you're put on the case

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and told Marie Roubard is working with this man. So far, what have you learned from her?"

"Nothing, except that she likes me."

"Grow up, chump!"

"Jacques says she wants to see me again," said Smooth. He grinned and shrugged one shoulder. "Who knows? Maybe it's my profile."

Gilda motioned toward the still figure in the corner of the cab. "Is that why she gave orders to have you killed?"

"How do you know she did?"

"I don't, but I'm willing to bet she had something to do with it."

"Let's hope so," said Smooth. "She's our only lead."

"Not quite," said Gilda. "For my money Mark Hesson is a better lead. He may be telling the truth, and I think he is, but there's something that tells me the *Malay Princess* is mixed up in this bomb-sight deal. When are you going to see Mark again?"

"In the morning. I'll report to Strickland and get his okay to hold the *Malay Princess*. Then I'll see what I can learn about Nadja Sherene. She likes me, too."

"So I noticed," said Gilda sharply. "And you seem to be doing very nicely with her. Better go easy, handsome. You usually get burnt when you try to match wits with women. Suppose you let me handle Nadja Sherene."

"You won't get far if tonight is a sample. What made you tangle with her, Gilda? Why didn't you string her along?"

"Because I don't like smart dames from Vienna!"

"Dear old Vienna," laughed Smooth. He opened the cab door. "Climb out and I'll drive Willie to a quiet street. The cops will pick him up in the morning and call it heart failure."

"And you'll leave Nadja to me?"

"Maybe."

Gilda stepped out of the cab and Smooth folded the Club Yvonne menu. He put it back into the hackman's pocket with the other things he had removed and closed the door. Gilda watched him climb into the driver's seat. She rested an elbow on the window ledge and looked at him seriously.

"Do you really think she's beautiful?" she asked.

"Nadja Sherene?"

"Yes."

Smooth stepped on the clutch and shifted into first. "Just between the two of us, gorgeous, I think she's the second-best looker I've ever met. You'd better skip upstairs and grab some sleep or she'll be moving into first place." He let in the clutch and rolled north.

CHAPTER IX

BLONDE DYNAMITE

SMOOTH was waiting a call from Gilda in his hotel room and was using the time to catch up with some rest. It had been a fast day and his feet were weary.

A trip to Mark Hesson's office had done him little good. In fact, it had only served to make things more confusing. Hesson could tell him nothing more than he already knew. One new thing had come up, however. The same Thomas Gray had phoned early in the day to warn Hesson again that the *Malay Princess* must be held at anchorage. He claimed the snatch at the Club Yvonne had nothing to do with his deal with Hesson—that he had not been a part of it.

Hesson doubted this and so did Smooth. Still, the ex-gambler claimed Gray had been insistent.

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Smooth had then reported to Strickland. The professor could give him no help, other than to get official permission to hold the *Malay Princess*. Nothing new had developed in Washington and this end of the case was entirely in Smooth's hands.

A trip to the Club Yvonne and a talk with some of the old-timers who played the hack line had done no good. The driver who had taken Smooth and Gilda the previous night was unknown to them. They hadn't seen him before or since. Neither had Riley, the doorman. As for the newspapers, a single paragraph had told of a cab driver found dead at his wheel, probably from heart failure.

Dave Haley's story had made headlines in the afternoon editions. There were pictures of Mark Hesson and rogues' gallery prints of Carmetta, Sully and the others. Smooth's name hadn't been mentioned, and he marked up another credit to Haley. The police were looking for the men and promised immediate arrests.

Smooth grinned. That line was older than old. The police would hunt a long while before they found Carmetta. Just as he would hunt a long while before he found anything about William Smith, the poisoned hackman. There was no use checking back through the hack bureau.

There were places on Canal Street where a man could buy a phoney hack-badge and card for fifty dollars. Or at least, there once had been such places and Smooth figured they were still in existence. With the right connections and enough money a man could buy anything from counterfeit bills to trick birth certificates. New York was like that.

As for Marie Roubard, Smooth figured he would have to play it across the board. He'd go to the Club Yvonne, talk with the orchestra leader and let her make the next move. If it was another mug with a gun, so much the better. Somehow, sometime, the boys would get careless. And then it might be Smooth's turn.

The phone rang and he reached for it.

"This is Nadja Sherene. Are you surprised that I called?"

"Pleasantly surprised," said Smooth. "Am I going to see you at the Club Yvonne tonight?"

"I hope not. Some friends of mine have been kind enough to let me use their penthouse while I'm in town—a lovely place on Central Park South. I though perhaps you would dine with me here and we could talk of Vienna."

"Good old Vienna. Expect me at eight."

"Have you a pencil handy? I'll give you the address."

"Let's have it."

"The Van Ness Apartments on Central Park South. Don't be late."

SMOOTH hung up and walked to the closet. His dinner jacket had come up from the tailor and he tossed it onto the bed. Dinner at eight. Reunion in Vienna. Trouble in a penthouse. And there was going to be trouble at that penthouse. No doubt of it.

The more he thought of it, the better he liked the guy who was running this mob. Direct and to the point. Smooth had made the first bid. The other had answered with a crack at Hesson. Then a hackman and a gun. That missed and he was making his next bid.

If the stakes were lower it would not have made sense. This move had practically put Nadja Sherene on the

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spot. Suppose she were picked up and questioned? Yeah—suppose! Smooth's smile was hard. If the going got too tough, the newspapers would carry another death notice. A big one, this time. One that told of a movie actress who had been stricken by heart failure while discussing some matters with the customs inspectors.

Evidently this crowd played marbles for keeps. One agent—two—a dozen—each with a job to do and a dose of poison to use if they failed. Smooth climbed out of his clothes and stepped under the shower. No use wondering what would happen tonight. He put on a white shirt and black tie, dropped the strap of his holster over his left shoulder and put on his coat.

There was a knock on the door. "Yes?" he called.

"Open up, handsome."

"Sorry," said Smooth. "Mr. Kyle is out. You should have phoned from the desk in the lobby."

"Open the door!"

Smooth did. He gaped at the evening gown Gilda was wearing. She walked into the room and sat near a window. Then she looked critically at Smooth's dinner jacket.

"Too English for you, darling," she said. "Still, it will do, I suppose. Where do we eat?"

"We don't."

"Nadja or Marie?"

"Guess."

"Nadja."

"You don't mind, do you?"

"Very much," said Gilda. "You're too partial to blondes. She'll make a fool of you. Take my advice and let me handle Nadja."

"Sorry, but this is my job. A nice one, too."

Gilda's manner had been light. It changed now. She crossed the room and jabbed an insistent finger against the gun under Smooth's arm. Her voice was hard.

"Grow up," she said. "That thing won't help you keep alive tonight. These people play a faster game. Do as I tell you and stay clear of Nadja until we learn who is running this crowd."

"Suppose Nadja tells me?"

"Smooth! Please do as I ask!"

He smiled and put an arm about her shoulders. "I'll call you later—sometime after midnight. We'll have a sandwich in Lindy's and talk things over."

"In other words, this is the brush-off?"

"Hardly that," said Smooth. "But I've a dinner date and I don't want to be late."

"Where does Nadja live?"

"In Beverly Hills."

"Idiot! I mean where is she now?"

"In the kitchen whipping up a cake for me, gorgeous.'

"You're making a mistake, Smooth," said Gilda seriously.

"That's the best thing I do," he answered. "Be nice and let me make it alone."

HE WAITED until Gilda had stepped into the elevator. Then he hurried to the phone and asked for the desk clerk. "Look, Eddie," he said quickly. "Gilda's on the elevator heading toward the lobby. Keep your eye on her and see if she leaves the hotel. Ask the starter to grab the address if she uses a cab. Call me right back."

"Right!" said the clerk.

Smooth glanced into the mirror. He readjusted his tie and ran a brush across his hair. He looked again at the address Nadja had given him and tried to recall who it was that had once lived in this penthouse that overlooked the

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Park. The phone rang before the name came to him and he lifted the receiver.

"She went right through the lobby," said the clerk. "Joe says she was plenty mad about something. Bawled the hackman out for being stupid and told him to drive to Madison and Sixty-third."

"Thanks, Eddie. That means I owe you a fin."

Smooth took a black felt from the closet shelf and hurried toward the elevator. The usual crowd was in the lobby. He nodded to a radio announcer, waved to a bookmaker and headed toward the revolving door. He had almost reached it when he saw a dark-faced man sitting near the desk in one of the large leather chairs.

Smooth paused. Bret Daniel wasn't the type to sit in hotel lobbies. A smart-money guy who could read the backs of a deck of cards as easily as a kid could read nursery rhymes. His eyes were dull but that meant exactly nothing. Bret spent most of his time trying to look stupid. The rest of his time was spent in trimming the chumps who believed him. Smooth turned and walked toward the gambler.

" 'Lo, Bret," he said. "Waiting for someone?"

"Yeah," said Daniel. "A couple of out-of-town buyers want to teach me something about poker. Do you mind?"

"Not at all," said Smooth. "But I wouldn't like it if you followed me out of the hotel."

"Me? Me, follow you? Why should I?"

"I wouldn't know," said Smooth. "Only—don't."

He went through the revolving door and the starter whistled for a cab. Smooth looked at the driver and shook his head.

"No dice," he said and pointed to the third cab in the line. "Tell Red this is his call."

The starter grinned and motioned to the red-headed driver. The cab swung out of line and the door opened. Smooth climbed in and the cab rolled.

"Take a waltz in traffic, Red," said Smooth. "When we're alone, hop into the Park and come out the Seventh Avenue gate on Fifty-ninth. While you're driving, try to remember who had the place on the roof of the Van Ness Apartments about five years ago."

"Five years ago?" said the driver. He swung into the traffic and rolled south. "It was Joe Chatre's place then, I think. Ran a card game and made plenty. Next I hear of the guy he's got a place in France. Then I hear he's working a wheel in jail there."

"Running a roulette wheel in jail?"

"Yeah! Can you tie that? I ask Little Frenchie about him and he tells me Joe is dealin' roulette in th' can."

"You mean in Cannes."

"Yeah."

Smooth laughed. "That's in southern France."

"So what?" said the hackman. "A can is a jail even if it is in southern France. Too bad about Joe. He was a right guy."

Smooth let it go. Red might be short on French but he knew how to get rid of any cab that might be following. He doubled through traffic, reached the Park and rolled out onto Central Park South. He stopped clear of the Van Ness Apartments, took the bill Smooth offered and made no attempt to dig for change. Red knew his riders.

The doorman had opened the huge brass and glass door but Smooth waited. He glanced toward Seventh Avenue, turned quickly and looked toward Sixth. There was a tall man in a dark suit standing at the curb as

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though he were waiting for a cab. Smooth drew a deep breath. It might have been coincidence that Bret Daniel was in the lobby of the hotel. It certanly wasn't coincidence that Walter Kunz was waiting for a cab on Central Park South. Daniel and Kunz usually worked together when a sucker was to be taken. Smooth wondered when the boys had moved him into this class.

CHAPTER X

SCRIPT FOR A KILLING

HE WALKED into the hall, sent up his name and was ushered to the elevator. The last time he had been in this building he had been chasing a smart gang of counterfeiters who had been passing their bills over dice tables. When the break came the name of the apartment had been kept out of the papers. No need to make it tough for the owner. He hadn't known that gamblers had rented the penhouse. He probably didn't know the place was now being used for an even bigger game.

The elevator stopped in a small bronze-walled house that opened onto a landscaped garden. Green shrubs and late blooming flowers lined the walks. There was a miniature fountain in a far corner and tiny streams of water ran among the shrubbery. Goldfish gaped up at Smooth from the pools that glowed with deep-colored lights.

He walked to the railed edge and looked at the lights moving through the Park. To the south the sky was a golden dome. Times Square was beneath it, gaudy, dazzling, beautiful. Smooth drew a breath of the night into his lungs and walked toward the penthouse.

The door was open and Nadja was at the piano in the living room. The lights were carefully lowered. Nadja played *Alt Wien*—a wistful thing written by a great composer. It was nicely done. There were lighted candles on the piano and a bottle of fine old sherry on a small table in front of the lounge.

"Okay for sound," said Smooth. "This is a take, everybody. Roll 'em, George!"

The music stopped. "Oh, you startled me!" said Nadja. She turned and smiled at Smooth. "For a moment I thought I was back in the studio. Where did you learn those technical terms?"

"It's in my blood," said Smooth. "My body may belong to Broadway but my heart is always in Hollywood."

"You've been there, too?"

"A few times but I like Vienna better. Not so many foreigners there."

Nadja stood and came toward him. She walked slowly, giving Smooth plenty of time to admire the severe lines of her soft crêpe gown of pale chartreuse. It was cut low, and at the base of the V was a hammered gold brooch. She wore no rings and her hair had been carefully braided; the braids set to form a soft crown of golden brown. Nadja was beautiful and Nadja knew it. She wanted Smooth to know it, too.

"Do you think it strange that I have asked you to come here tonight?" asked Nadja. She put her arm through Smooth's and walked with him to the lounge.

"Not at all," said Smooth. "You get your orders, just as I do."

"Orders?"

"Yes. Why clown about it?"

Nadja seated herself and motioned to Smooth. He glanced at the wall behind the lounge. No windows. No drapes. He seated himself beside her

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and reached for a jade box of cigarettes. Nadja took one and he held the match. She smoked quietly for a time.

"You're very direct, Smooth," she said at length. "So direct you almost frighten me."

"That makes two of us who are frightened."

"I don't believe it. I've heard too much about you."

"Yeah? Who is my press agent?"

"We both know I won't answer that," she said. "Would you like some sherry?"

"Yes."

SHE filled two glasses and offered one to Smooth. He took it, held it to the light and admired the color of the wine. Then he held it toward Nadja.

"An old Irish custom," he said. "Will you drink first?"

"Why not?" said Nadja. She bent forward and sipped from the glass. "And at dinner, I'll ask you only to eat what I do. Will that be all right?"

"Perfect," said Smooth. "I hadn't expected to last until dinner. Why the delay?"

She laughed. "This is turning into farce, Smooth. Things like this simply don't happen! You're the most impossible man I've ever met."

"Then why drag it out? Ring the bell or blow a whistle or give whatever signal you've arranged and tell Daniel and Kunz to start shooting. A dollar gets you twenty they both miss the first three shots."

"Daniel and Kunz? I've never heard of them."

"Ever hear of William Smith, a hackman?"

"No."

"He tried last night. It didn't work."

Smooth was getting edgy. As Nadja had said, the whole thing was turning into a farce. She'd invited him here to be killed. He'd accepted the bid. It was as good a way as any to start things rolling but why didn't they make their try? He reached forward and rubbed his cigarette against a jade tray. He finished the sherry in his glass and put it down. Nadja rested her hand upon his arm.

"They told me you were cold," she said quietly. "They told me you would laugh when it happened. I doubted it, and they said you had more nerve than any man I had ever met. And that made me think that perhaps—"

"Perhaps what?"

"That perhaps you might find a way out for both of us."

Smooth leaned back against the pillows. The thing was getting worse as it went along. He had been deliberate in carrying the fight to Nadja. He'd expected protests. Indignation. Anything but a cool acceptance that she had invited him here to be killed. Now came this sympathy gag. It was almost childish.

"Stop me if I'm wrong," he said finally. "But I think I know the lines. You're in this thing against your wish. Some one has a terrible hold over you and you must do as he instructs. But at heart you're just a simple, good, honest girl who wants to settle down and raise babies and rubber plants. I'm the big strong man who is going to show you the way out. Together we face the world and together we win. Then the camera dollies up and we go into a clinch. We hold it as long as the Hays office permits and then fade. That it?"

"Almost."

"It's a lousy plot and it won't sell. Try a new one."

"Perhaps I'd better," said Nadja.

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She looked at Smooth and two tears gathered on her long lashes. She stood and put a hand to her lips. "Excuse me a moment, Smooth. I don't want to make a fool of myself. You see, I'm supposed to be a very wise and sophisticated woman and—well, I'm afraid I'm going to cry."

"Go right ahead," said Smooth.

SHE walked toward a narrow hall that opened onto another room almost as large as this. Smooth recalled the layout perfectly. The man who had used this place for cards and dice had set the second room aside as a library. Beyond it was a small suite that opened onto the terrace.

He walked slowly toward a long center table. There was a lamp with a bronze bowl at one end. A statuette of a dancing girl was opposite. Between them was a popular news magazine that devoted most of its space to photographs. It was lying face down, opened to a series of war pictures as though Nadja had been glancing through the pages when Smooth was announced and dropped it to take her place at the piano.

Smooth glanced at the pictures. He took the magazine and walked to a corner from which he could watch each of the three doors in the room.

Minutes passed. He turned the pages slowly. Then he stopped and ran his finger along one of the margins. His hand moved slowly over a series of raised dots.

"Instructions from Center again, eh?" he said softly. "Number Thirty-one will disregard the orders of last night and will pass Kyle along to Number Twenty-five tonight. She will continue with Hodkins as before and drop Mindelm immediately. Order of Center.' "

Smooth ran his fingers along the margin a third time to be sure of the text of the message. Then he walked to the table and replaced the magazine as he had found it. Undoubtedly Nadja Sherene was Number Thirty-one. She was to pass him along and give some poor chump named Hodkins a workout. As for Mindelm, the manufacturer, either they had learned what they wanted to know or had decided to let someone else work on him.

Smooth memorized the message. He walked to the lounge and soon he saw Nadja coming toward him. She was smiling now. But he noticed her eyes were inflamed and slightly swollen.

"We'll have dinner whenever you wish," she said. "Or perhaps you would rather dine out. The Club Yvonne, if you like."

"I don't like."

"You're being rude, Smooth."

"Why not? Do I have to be nice to a girl who tried to put me on the spot?"

"No," she said. "But I'm afraid you've learned to mistrust people to such an extent that sometimes you don't recognize truth."

"When did I hear it?"

"A few moments ago when I said you might find a way out for both of us."

"Oh, we're back to that again?"

Nadja smiled and leaned against the cushions. The soft material of her gown accentuated each line of her figure. A subtle and heady perfume added to the appeal of her voice, her lips, her large brown eyes. Smooth thought it might be better if he watched the doors more closely. Then he thought again. He liked to look at beautiful women. And Nadja was all of that. She put one hand on his arm. Smooth grinned and shook his head.

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"I might have to use that arm in a hurry."

"Not tonight. At least, not while you're here. This is one place I can promise you will be safe."

"What makes you so sure?"

"A message I received a short while ago."

SMOOTH hadn't expected that. He looked sharply at Nadja. Her eyes were turned toward the magazine on the table. One strand of her golden brown hair had broken from the tightly coiled braid. It rested against her cheek. She lifted her hand and put it in place.

"Would you like me to explain?"

"Why not? I've got nothing else to do."

"I suppose you've heard something about my history—that I was born in Vienna and worked in pictures there?"

"Dave Haley gave me a quick idea."

"If I thought Dave equal to the task," she said, "he might have been able to give you more than a quick idea. For the past two months I've been trying to decide whether or not to hand him the biggest news flash that ever went over a radio. Tonight, I've decided to give it to you, instead."

"My profile, probably. Or is it my eyes?"

"Your eyes are the coldest things I've ever seen."

"Yours are beautiful."

"Please be serious for a moment, Smooth!"

"It's your own fault. I'm a sucker for perfume."

She shook her head and again tears formed in her eyes. Nadja stood up. There was the sound of a distant bell. A maid crossed the room and hurried to the open door. Smooth heard the elevator stop in the outer house. He heard footsteps on the small pathway.

"Expecting company?"

"No," said Nadja. Her face held a look of bewilderment.

A uniformed messenger boy stood at the door. He handed an envelope to to the maid. "Sign here," he said, and pushed out a paper. The maid signed and came toward Nadja. Smooth stepped past her.

"Hey, boy!" he said sharply.

The messenger turned. "Yeah? Somethin' you want?"

Smooth laughed. "Just you, Shorty. What's the idea of the trick uniform?"

"You got me wrong, mister."

"Not this time," said Smooth. He stepped forward and knocked back the peak of the messenger's cap. "How could I forget Shorty Meyers? Why he's the guy that used to be Frankie Yale's bodyguard back in the old days. Used to be fast with a gun, then. Are you still fast, Shorty?"

"I don't want no trouble, Smooth."

"No? Then why come looking for it?"

He bent forward and ran his left hand over the pockets of the uniform. "You must be slipping, feller," he said. "Who sent you after me without a gun, and why?"

"It ain't like you think," said the little man. "Gimme a break, Smooth. It ain't like you think."

Smooth looked quickly at Nadja. "Read it out loud."

"But it doesn't make sense," she said. "The message simply says—*How are you doing, Handsome?* And it's signed, *Gorgeous.*"

Smooth sighed and grabbed the messenger by the collar and the seat of his pants. He started him toward the elevator and hurried him with the toe of his shoe.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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Till Doomsday

By RICHARD SALE

Author of "River Risin'," "The Lonely World," etc.

Of course there are some who'll say this never happened to the *Mary Watson* and her crew. But not those who follow the sea; not those who know that the Flying Dutchman sails hopelessly till Doomsday

I

NORTH of them, across the miles of black wet howling night, Cape Town reposed upon the sturdy rocks of Africa, feeling the storm too, but not the shock of ocean.

The *S. S. Mary Watson,* Baltimore, Maryland, was an old ship. That did not mean she was senile. She had been with the sea a long time and she knew its foibles and handled herself with uncanny dexterity. But she had not been built originally to stand such buffeting, and her age made her joints creak when the heavy seas pounded her.

It was Bruno's watch, and he did not like it at all. Only once before, east in the Caribbean Sea, after a sore and breathless misty dawn, had he seen a wind with such velocity. They would soon be in trouble, and he knew it, and so he called up the old man and put the responsibility where it belonged.

The night was black, yet they could see some of it because the bridge was even blacker. Where the combers burst upon the forepiece and swept the *Mary Watson's* deck to the beam, there to be spit back into the sea through the scuppers, the water exploded alternately white and green against the tapestry of darkness.

Outside, as Captain John Lowrie soon found, the night was filled with the wind and the ocean, the rain had slackened preceptibly, but the wind hauled southwest the port side, and it nearly blew his teeth into his throat.

He gripped the rail and went up the stairs toward the bridge, catching a glimpse of the *Mary Watson's* lonely funnels staggering overhead in the dark. Forward, he was barely able to discern the bridge wingtips with their glass weatherbreaks. The high howl of the wind on the boat deck smothered the deep thunder of the raging seas alongside as they swept by, white, mad, rapacious.

He stepped off the bridge and slammed the door shut behind him, shaking his shoulders as if to cast off an invisible centipede. He was soaked with rain. He stared across the darkness of the bridge at Bruno, and said, "It's a fine night to call a man out."

Bruno said nothing. There was nothing to say. The weather conditions spoke for themselves, and even a seasick landlubber could tell by the way the *Mary Watson* pitched and rolled that all was not well.

Captain Lowrie walked over to the helmsman, who clung to the wheel nervously, his eyes wide as he peered through the rain-studded window. The helmsman's name was Murphy, and he

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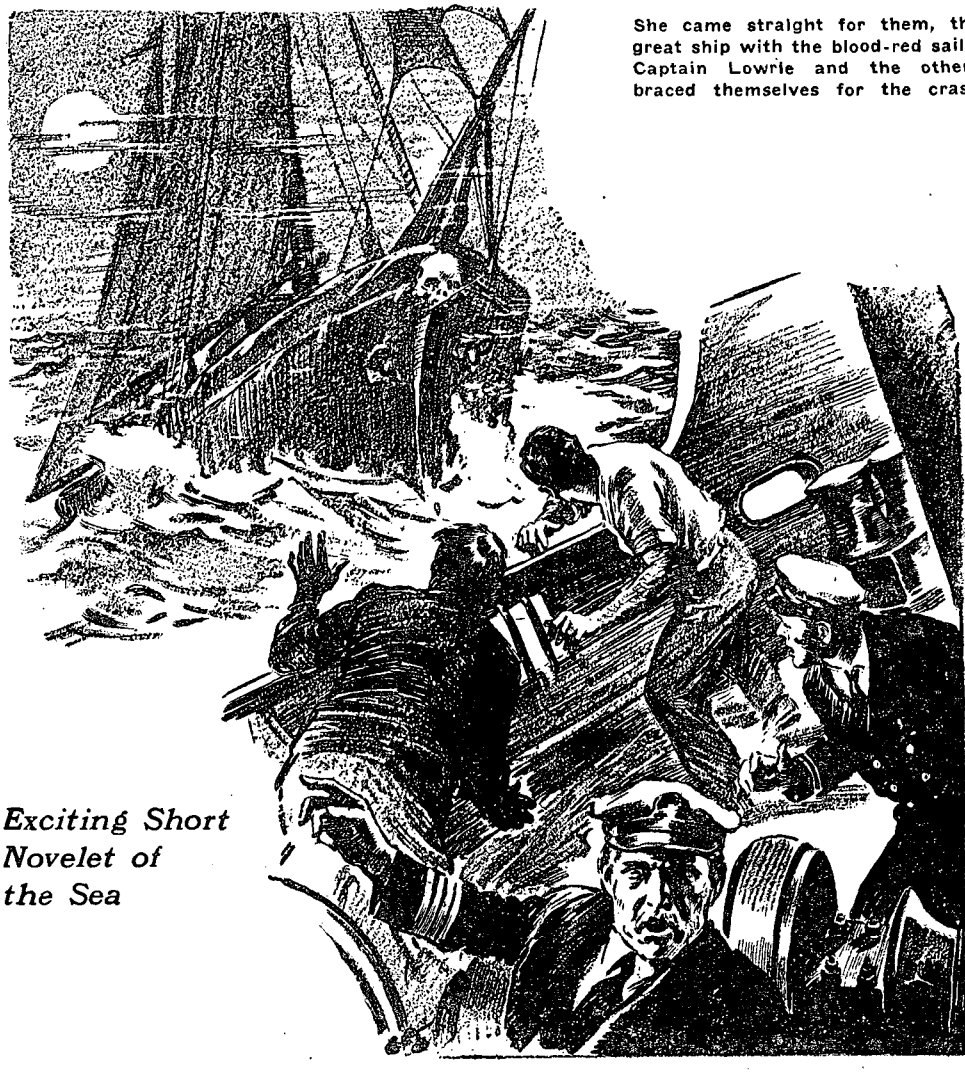

She came straight for them, the great ship with the blood-red sails. Captain Lowrie and the others braced themselves for the crash

Exciting Short Novelet of the Sea

was young. He was nervous because he was having his first taste of the whole gale.

"How does she go, mister?" asked Captain Lowrie.

"She goes hard and heavy, sir," replied Murphy, his voice dry and flat.

BRUNO said, "I've been in communication with Mr. McNulty, sir, in the engineroom, and he reports excessive vibration in the shaft. I changed speed to dead slow, but that seemed to make little difference. To my way of thinking, we should heave to for the night, until this blows out."

"To *my* way of thinking, there's little sense in that," said Captain Lowrie. "Change your course, mister. Due southwest, nothing off. Look alive now."

There was thunder in the seas as the helmsman brought her over. Her blunt prow dug in hard and firm, the blows running through her body with startling vibrations. The starboard bow

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vanished under the weighted seas, but in another moment it was clear and she was dead in the wind, pitching and tossing, the sickening rolls now gone.

They could all feel the difference at once. The strain went out of her rusty plates. Her fore and aft motion was short and sharp, as a good pitch should be. Mr. Murphy at the helm relaxed considerably.

"Well now," said Captain Lowrie, "that was a small thing to get a man out in this kind of night for. How did you expect her to go easy with the waves on her beam?"

Bruno did not mind the jibe. Indeed, Captain Lowrie did not mean for it to be taken seriously. They both knew that the course could be changed only with the captain's permission. And for all the heartiness in Captain Lowrie's voice, there was still a troubled look around his eyes. Bruno noticed it and knew what it meant. For dead in the wind, her blunt bow rebuffing the staggering blows of the giant waves, the *Mary Watson* was safe enough. But there were many things that could happen: a broken screw, a burned-out bearing, or another ship out there in the darkness, unseen. Power was the thing. Without it, they were lost.

Captain Lowrie said, "What does Sparks report?"

"Sparks was in touch with Cape Town half an hour ago, and he reports there ain't a ship within seventy miles of us. The nearest one is the *Nichyo Maru*. She's due west of us, so we've nothing to worry about in the way of a collision."

"It's nice to know," said Captain Lowrie. "A lookout couldn't sight the devil's own seven masters on a night like this."

Bruno shivered. "Aye, sir," he said. "I've seen a night like this only once in fourteen years at sea. And I never want to see another. It's the sort of black dark night when seamen's yarns come true. Mr. Franklin was telling me a while back that he saw St. Elmo's fire on the mast."

Franklin was second officer of the *Mary Watson*.

"St. Elmo's fire!" Captain Lowrie exclaimed. "And what's so mythical about St. Elmo's fire? I've seen it many a time at sea, and not a stormy night needed for it, either. When I was mate of the schooner *Chaff*, fishing the Grand Banks out of Gloucester, a long time ago, I seen St. Elmo's fire time and again. Little crackling flames, sharp and clear, dancing across the yardarms. St. Elmo's fire is no myth. It's real."

Murphy at the helm stirred uneasily and opened his mouth. But he shut it again without saying anything.

Captain Lowrie stared at him. "Was you goin' to say something, mister?"

MURPHY wet his lips, swallowed hard. "You were talking of seamen's yarns, Captain, and it was just that I was remembering some others I've heard. Tales of the Sargasso, the mystery of the *Marie Celeste*, and of the Flying Dutchman."

"Ah," said Captain Lowrie. "The Dutchman!" He rubbed his hand through his shaggy mustache, and the bristly sound of it filled the bridge. "The Dutchman indeed."

He said it with such fervor that Bruno turned and stared at him. "Surely, sir," he said, "you don't believe them old wives' tales in this day and age?"

Captain Lowrie did not reply at once. He stared out through the storm window above the faint miserly glow

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which illumined the compass card, and he locked his hands behind his back and swayed easily with the motion of the freighter.

"Old wives' tales, eh?" He shook his head slowly. "You're young, Mr. Bruno, and maybe that's the reason; but me—I've been a seaman nigh onto twenty-five years, and there's strange things happen in the seas. Strange indeed."

Mr. Murphy swallowed again, so hard this time that he made a clucking sound. There wasn't much light on the bridge, but the little there was showed his face pale and white. The sound of his gulp drew the old man's eyes.

"Feeling seasick, mister?" the captain said.

"No sir," replied Mr. Murphy. "I was just rememberin'."

"Remembering what?"

"I was rememberin', Captain, that we're off the Cape of Good Hope in a blow. And that's just about what happened to the Flying Dutchman, isn't it?"

"Mind the helm!" Mr. Bruno said sharply. He glanced at the quartermaster with some contempt. "You're nervous enough, mister, without getting scared about a ghost."

"Yes sir," Mr. Murphy said.

II

"AYE," Captain Lowrie ruminated soberly. "There's strange things in the sea. You, Mr. Bruno, you don't believe in sea serpents, I take it. There's more things in heaven and earth and ocean than a man could ever dream about."

"*I* believe in sea serpents. I believe there is things in the ocean no man has ever seen. Why, bless St. Christopher, it was near this very spot that a trawler hauled a fish out of the sea that was supposed to have been dead for fifty million years. Them scientific fellows have been reconstructing it from fossils they found some place in Europe."

"And right here, near Cape Town, a smelly trawler hauls it topside. Extinct for fifty million years, and yet not dead at all! I tell you, Mr. Bruno, no man knows what's under the sea. And for that matter, no man knows what's above the sea, either. So who's to say the legend of the Flying Dutchman ain't true?"

Bruno sniffed. "Personally, sir, I don't believe in ghosts," he said.

Captain Lowrie snorted gruffly. "And I don't suppose you think it's bad luck to kill an albatross or a gull? I don't suppose you think a ship is a 'she.' I don't suppose you think a shark following in the wake is bad luck. Silly superstitions for old fools like me, eh?"

"I didn't say that, sir."

"What's the difference, man, if you think it?"

Bruno shrugged. Captain Lowrie continued:

"When I was mate aboard the *S. S. Gulf City*—she was a Standard Oil tanker in the coastwise trade—we had two seamen die of ptomaine poisoning. We buried them at sea, somewhere off Hatteras. I'd always heard that yarn about a dead man following a ship he loved, just as easily as a rat deserted a ship that was doomed.

"Next day, the watch spied one of the corpses floating in our wake, right after us. He thought maybe his eyes were tricking him, so he ran to get a camera to take a picture. But when he came back, the corpse was gone. We all joshed him about it.

"Two days later, off the Virginia

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Cape—now mind you, we buried them off Hatteras—the watch spied both them men floating in our wake! This time he had a camera with him, and he took a picture. He wanted to make sure that he would have something to prove his word, this time.

"But he needn't have been in such a hurry, because this time they didn't disappear. They hung on our wake all day long, and every member of the ship got an eyeful of them. They were there as plain as day; you could even see their faces. From Hatteras to the Virginia Cape, mind you, and no explanation for that, eh, Mr. Bruno?

"Finally, off Cape May, they disappeared and we didn't see them again. Every word of that story is true, Mr. Bruno, and there are the pictures to back it up. So clear and good were they, that a big New York magazine published them, and lots of people tried to explain it away. But you couldn't explain away two dead men following a ship over six hundred miles, lying there in the wake as plain as day."

BRUNO'S brow was furrowed. "Wasn't there some explanation offered, sir, to the effect that the suction of the ship's wake might have held the corpses behind her?"

Captain Lowrie chuckled sardonically. "There may have been some such explanation, Mr. Bruno. But you yourself at this very moment take little stock in it."

"Oh well," Bruno muttered. "I'll admit that strange things happen on land or sea and that sometimes there isn't much explanation for them. But the legend of the Flying Dutchman is something else again, unless I've got it all wrong."

Captain Lowrie seated himself in a chair and tipped it back against the wall, balancing there precariously as the freighter pitched in the ponderous sea. He seemed quite at ease. He rubbed at his mustache with his left hand, and then proceeded to address himself to Mr. Bruno.

"The Flying Dutchman is the Wandering Jew of the ocean. Nobody knows what his name is now; it's forgotten over the years. But a long time ago, and on such a night as this, the Dutchman was rounding the Cape of Good Hope in a three-masted schooner. She was called the *Fleigende Hollander*.

"He was a turbulent and headstrong sailor, this Dutchman. The storm was against him. The winds were against him. The men on his decks begged him to turn back, but he refused. 'I'll round the Cape of Good Hope tonight,' he said, 'in spite of wind or storm or Heaven or Hell.'

"For thus defying the elements and the Devil, he was cursed, condemned to roam the oceans of the world until the crack of Doomsday. And there was only one thing could save him; the love of a woman who would be faithful to him after death."

Captain Lowrie chuckled. "You can see where the poor man never had a chance. Ain't a woman alive could redeem him. It would take a lot of faith in these streamlined days."

Bruno grunted. "And do you actually believe, sir, that the Flying Dutchman exists today?"

"I don't say I do," replied Captain Lowrie, "and I don't say I don't."

A SLIVER of lightning cut across the night sky, followed by a reverberating crash of thunder. Murphy, at the helm, jerked, startled by its sound, and nearly loosed his grip upon the spoke. "He could be here," the helmsman faltered. "He could be right

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here, where he made his oath that stormy night a hundred years ago."

Bruno sprang to the wheel and grasped it. "Mind the course, you fool! You've dropped five points."

He turned and stared accusingly at Captain Lowrie who still perched on the chair, little bothered by the fact that the *Mary Watson's* bow had swung off the wind.

"There you see, sir, what good these tales of phantom ships can do. If it were only that they lent some color or adventure or glamor to the sea, I wouldn't mind them. But they make for terror and incompetency, they make men afraid and inefficient. That's why I don't believe in ghosts, Captain. And I'm a better seaman for it."

Captain Lowrie's bushy white eyebrows came far down over his eyes. He glowered at Bruno. "If it were only that such tales made men afraid," he said, "I would agree with you, Mr. Bruno. But why in the name of Davy Jones this lubber is afraid of the Dutchman is more than I can see. He's shaking like a leaf. I'll wager he cannot tell you why."

Murphy, his mouth grim and taut, clung to the helm and said nothing.

"Look here, man," said Captain Lowrie, "you expect the Dutchman will be out on a night like this looking for you to take you along to Hell with himself. Were he here, the Dutchman, poor soul, would only be trying to make the same passage we are, around the Cape against the storm.

"By the beard of St. Christopher, if he has one, I'd just as leave give him a tow if we met up with him. It would be the common courtesy of one seaman to another. And like as not he'd do the same for me. But the Dutchman, God save him, is busy on another sea in this world tonight, I'll wager."

He stirred in the chair and rose unsteadily to his feet as the freighter wallowed in the trough. "It's that late that I'm sleepy. So I'll catch my forty winks. The wind is holding steadily now, and should be dropping soon, and we'll be on our way. Tell Mr. McNulty to stand by in case we need him. Keep a weather eye peeled for a shift in the wind. And if things don't get better, call me up again."

"Aye, sir," said Bruno.

III

NEAR three o'clock in the morning, some time after the ship's chronometer had rung out five bells, the wind began to slacken. The heavy dangerous sea did not abate in force, but the rain vanished and the wind dropped off so sharply that the spume on the breaking crest was no longer visible.

Down in the black hole of Calcutta, where the gleaming polished propeller-shaft faithfully ground out its r. p. m.'s, McNulty, the chief engineer, felt the *Mary Watson* gaining headway. The wind which had held them back now dissipated, allowing her, even at dead slow, to forge ahead.

Where before the freighter had expended only enough energy to equalize her position in the wind, now she was under way once more. And McNulty, a Scotchman who liked scones, Scotch and Beethoven, was glad of it. A few minutes later, and the engineroom, telegraphed from the bridge, clanged its way to half speed.

McNulty marked the telegraph gyrations, and then turned up the turbine engine. It was a pleasure to feel the *Mary Watson* bite in steadily and head due east once more.

On the bridge, where the remnants of the wind still howled past the cor-

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ners, pushing the thick white milky scuds before it, Bruno noted his course on the chart. He felt very good. But he was enough of a realist to know that they were not out of the woods yet. He no longer doubted they would make the passage safely; but he was afraid that in making it the *Mary Watson* would reach Zanzibar with a stove-in hatch.

Still there was no choice. The gale had blown them far west of their course, and they had lost both precious time and fuel. Bruno telephoned the captain, and the old man agreed with him that the steady old tub should be pushed with as much speed as she could safely handle in the seaway.

AT THREE-FIFTEEN, the ragged clouds vanished, and the darkness of the bridge was suddenly illumined with pale moonlight. It was very faint, for streaky will-o'-the-wisps still scurried across its slender face. But there was, at least, some visibility, and Bruno was very heartened.

The wave crest ran very high, but no longer broke. The glassy hollows, where salt bubbles split rapidly, were long and deep. One moment, as the *Mary Watson* topped a grayback, Mr. Bruno could see miles of ridged, pock-marked sea. Then would follow the awsome drop into the trough, where the horizon would merely be the top of the next wave away.

Eastbound, the sea was on their corners, and the *Mary Watson* rolled alarmingly in the swell. But her speed steadied her somewhat, even though the going was very wet forward. And Bruno knew that by dawn the Cape of Good Hope would be astern.

Franklin, the second officer, presently joined Bruno on the bridge. It was not his stint, but it had been a rotten night to sleep, and Franklin was just as glad to be out of his bunk.

At three-thirty A. M., a strange intensity pervaded the entire ship. Overhead, the moon suddenly hid itself behind a bulky cloud. There was only the faintest indication of moonlight left upon the turbulent crest.

In his cabin Captain John Lowrie, who had been snoring lustily, suddenly awoke out of a sound sleep for no reason at all and sat up in his bunk, disturbed and apprehensive.

In the enginerooms, McNulty, who had all but surrendered his duties to his assistant, McAdoo, content that the ship was well out of trouble, returned suddenly to his post, vaguely troubled and not knowing why.

In the galley, where the ship's cook had bedded himself down for the night, Toby, the ship's cat, who had been sleeping serenely upon the breadbox, suddenly awoke, backed to a corner and began to growl, the long hairs down his back standing straight up on end.

On the bridge they felt it, too. Bruno looked up from his place at the chart table and shivered. He was not cold, and he did not know why he had done it. Franklin, who had been sitting in the chair that Captain Lowrie had vacated, suddenly stirred uneasily and rubbed the backs of his hands briskly.

"That's funny," he said. "I've just had the strangest feeling—"

Bruno met his eyes. They stared at each other.

THE starboard door of the bridge opened, and Captain Lowrie walked in. He did not say anything, just walked to the chart table and sat down beside Bruno. There was a frown on his face, and he looked worried.

"It was as if," Captain Lowrie would

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tell his wife some months later, in Boston, "we had all gone to a concert. It was that moment of great sense of silence, as the baton goes up just before the music begins."

It was like that, that moment charged with static electricity before the baton drops, when you can almost imagine you hear the music even before it has begun. The sea, there, pounding on her starboard quarter, might have been a kettle-drum. The dying wind, still whining high, might have been the first violin.

And under their feet, the freighter dropped into a deep and darkened valley. The boat wallowed there a moment, panting, and then with sovereign dignity forced her blunt bow up the wall of water which came rushing on. And when she reached the peak of that watery mountain she paused, as if to survey the studded voyage before her.

Young Murphy at the helm suddenly gaped into the faintly luminescent night before his eyes.

"In the name of Heaven!" Murphy said hollowly.

The other three—Captain Lowrie, Bruno, and Franklin—moved as one man. They sprang to their feet, instantly aware of Murphy's contorted face.

It was fear, Captain Lowrie knew. He had seen it often enough. The eyes, all white and glazed the blanched skin, the dropped jaw which hung on Murphy's chest, the quivering mouth. They too, faced the sea and watched expectantly beyond the waves.

Out of the night, like a great white ghost, they saw the ship. She was about a hundred feet long, her sails all set and filled. Captain Lowrie had never seen such a color in sails before. Blood-red they were, like a dying sunset, the strangest color his eyes had ever seen: for the moonlight was faint, and in the back of his mind he wondered how sails of any color could be that bright.

She was on the starboard tack, heeled well over, and she had a white foam in her teeth. There were moving shadows of men on her decks. The *Mary Watson* was bound east, but this strange schooner with her blood-red sails was bound due north and she seemed to come right at them.

Her speed was amazing. She seemed to plunge ahead much faster than the wind which billowed her sails.

Through binoculars, Captain Lowrie could see a name upon her bow; but it was hazy and indistinct through the glass, and he could not make it out.

But he could make out her figurehead. At the base of the bowsprit, wet and glistening as the heavy bow plunged into the waves, he made out the grinning death's head.

Three masts, sticking up into the sky nakedly like inverted streaks of lightning, a death's head at the bow, blood-red sails: a schooner in a storm at the Cape of Good Hope, and an oath with the Devil.

"The Dutchman!" Captain Lowrie roared. "The Flying Dutchman!"

IV

BRUNO wrenched the binoculars away from the captain's grasp, and peered out into the night himself. The glasses trembled in his hand. They were seven-power glasses and hard to hold upon the scene, but he managed it a moment and then dropped them from his eyes; and he was white and shaking.

"It's not The Dutchman," he said savagely. "It's a ship, a sailing ship, and she's running without lights. Sheer off, helmsman, sheer off to the north. She'll strike us!"

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But Franklin had already wrested the wheel from the quartermaster, and he was bringing it hard over. The freighter's bow swung northward from east, and in the cross-sea the *Mary Watson* rolled dangerously.

"She's a phantom," Captain Lowrie said hoarsely. "She's the Dutchman out of Holland, trying to round the Cape."

"You're mad!" Bruno snapped. "She's just a ship, an old sea trader, perhaps."

Captain Lowrie had the binoculars again. He held them on her bow as she came closer to them. *"Fliegende Hollander,"* he said, his voice trembling. "It's there on the bow, under the bowsprit, as plain as day. Look for yourself, man! Her name is there, right there—the *Fliegende Hollander,* and her hailing port is Amsterdam."

"It's your imagination; you are all filled up with the Dutchman's lore," Bruno replied.

And then he said nothing more. There was no time to say anything more. Silently and tensely they watched her come. She was a savage ship, and she laid the water white around her bow where she plunged in. Her bowsprit stabbed the sea like a guard sword.

She was very close now; so close that they could see the sailors on her deck. They seemed to be Norwegian. And back on the poopdeck, by the great helm, there stood a tall, brusk man with a great black cape around his shoulders.

His nose was large, and he had a heavy beard; and as the schooner bore upon them, Captain Lowrie could see this man wildly wave a great burly hand.

For a moment, it looked as if she would strike them near the stern, as if to slash the combing and the screw clean off, and leave the rest of the *Mary Watson* floating in the ocean, a powerless hulk. In that breathless moment, Captain Lowrie saw her flag, curling out to leeward above the blood-red sails. It was the flag of Holland.

Bruno saw it, too. "It could be a Dutch ship, and nothing more," he whispered. "A Dutch ship, an ordinary ship, and nothing more." He was talking to reassure himself, but they all heard him.

"She's the Dutchman," Captain Lowrie said, quietly now. "Stand by for a crash."

BUT there was no crash. The black ship, when she had forced the *Mary Watson* to turn due north, suddenly sheered off. They could see her captain, that big bearded man at the helm, swinging the wheel hard to starboard; and her bow, with a death's head for a figurehead, swung off the freighter's stern and turned northwest.

Swiftly she was abaft the stern. They saw her dip into the deep trough between two towering crests. Only her curling flag and the tops of the three masts were left visible. And suddenly they sank down, too, and seemed to vanish.

And when the next wave away reached that spot to lift her to its top, she did not rise. Indeed, she was no longer there.

"She's gone!" Franklin gasped.

"Gone indeed," Captain Lowrie said.

Bruno, his brow lined with multiple wrinkles, peered intently at the spot where he had last seen her. "Has she sunk?" he said. "Did she go down?"

Nobody answered his questions. Captain Lowrie murmured, "He sheered off. Did you see him sheer off? He didn't mean to strike us in the first

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place. He was satisfied to push us off our course. That was all he wanted. It was as plain as day; and having done that he's gone and vanished like any good ghost should."

The blood was flowing back into Bruno's cheeks. He straightened, and felt more assured.

"Ghost, my eye!" he snapped. "He would have cut us in half, if he hadn't seen us at the last moment. The captain of that ship is a fool. I wish we could have got her name, and reported her. He picked a fine stormy night to be running without lights."

He scanned the turbulent seas for some sign of her. But there was none. "But where did she go?"

Captain Lowrie did not attempt to answer him. He addressed himself to Franklin.

"Bring her back, mister," he said. "Bring her back on the east-bound route. I don't know the meaning of it, but it's over and done. So let's be on our way again, with the sea on the quarter. This old lady is panting—she never did like a following sea."

Franklin brought back the helm, and the *Mary Watson* soon turned slowly eastward, where a faint leaden glow was beginning to touch the sky, off in eternity where the sea met the heavens.

The telephone rang. Captain Lowrie answered it. It was McNulty, calling from the black hole of Calcutta, annoyed and bothered. "Captain, sir," he said, "must we be staying in a following sea? When my screws near the surface, they all but shake my shaft out of its bearings."

"I've other things to worry about beside your shaft," Captain Lowrie replied. The course is my concern, and the shaft is yours, Mr. McNulty. So mind your P's and Q's. There'll be no more following seas if we can help it. But then again, I ain't in a position to make any promises."

He hung up abruptly.

ABOUT ten minutes had passed since they had last seen the three-masted will-o'-the-wisp bury itself in that trough.

The wind had all but died. The rain had definitely vanished. The seas were beginning to drop. But only slightly. The cloud which hid the moon passed on, and the night was once again filled with a silver glow.

The four men stood up at the weatherbreak now, watching the night sharply. Only Captain Lowrie's face seemed relaxed. Murphy's was afraid. Bruno's was taut. Franklin's was harried.

And while they stood there, they felt it again, that strange fluttering feeling upon their heartstrings. Like violins in tremolo. Bruno shivered; his hands felt icy cold.

"Mind the helm," Captain Lowrie said sharply.

Franklin had raised his left hand. He pointed it out past the weatherbreak. In awed, sepulchral tone he said, "Look!"

They looked. But Captain Lowrie had already seen it. "Aye," he said coolly. "She's back again."

Mr. Murphy, the quartermaster, tried to keep his teeth from chattering. But he could not manage it. The cracking sound of them filled the bridge.

It was true enough. She was back again. But this time she came from the north. All of her sails were set, and her lee scuppers were awash. She was running close-hauled, and her bow was under a wall of water most of the time.

Bruno stared at the flag upon his

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own mast. It curled to the south. That meant the wind had shifted due north.

"But how," Bruno asked in a choked voice, "can she run close-hauled against the wind which is directly astern of her?"

"She ain't no ordinary ship," Captain Lowrie replied. "And not a ship to be afraid of, either, mister," he remarked to the trembling quartermaster. "Only three hours back, I offered the Dutchman a tow around Good Hope, if need be. And it ain't like one good seaman to return ill to another good seaman, when only good has been offered. He means well, no doubt. But what he means, I can't yet fathom."

Bruno said, "But the wind has all but died. How can a ship point down with such speed when there isn't any wind to push her?"

"I told you, mister," answered Captain Lowrie, "she ain't no ordinary ship."

NO MORE was said. They all stood stock still, tense, and watched her come. She had seemed far ahead of them to port when they first sighted her again. But already she was much closer. There was white water all around her. She seemed to slash at the ocean. The *Mary Watson's* own speed had carried her far ahead, so that now the schooner with the red sails was sharply off the port bow.

"A mirage," Bruno said thickly. "A mirage." He spoke with hope, not with conviction. He too, like the quartermaster, was trembling now.

The schooner seemed so close now that they could have thrown a belaying pin upon her deck. And suddenly her intentions were plain She held her way, adamantly, and every man on the fated bridge knew what she would do.

She was going to cut across their bow. Cut across them, sharp and close, impaling herself upon their forepiece if necessary. She would not give way this time, she would not sheer off. The bearded man at her helm, firm and resolute, had frozen there.

Captain Lowrie sprang to the engineroom telegraph and swung it to full speed astern. In the engineroom, McNulty went crazy, wondering what was happening topside.

The *Mary Watson* groaned and paused in the seaway as her single engine went into reverse. The lone screw churned the water white behind her, imparting a terrific vibration throughout her hull, which threatened to split the rusty plates asunder.

The freighter almost made it, but not quite. Despite her revolving screw pulling full speed astern, her impetus carried her forward. Under her bow, where her anchors clung to their niches, the schooner with the blood-red sails passed. She looked big and real now, although the men on her deck still seemed to be shadows.

Captain Lowrie and the others braced themselves for the crash. Surely it would be her beam, directly in their path. In a moment, there would be the splintering wood of her hull flying up, smacked by the steel bow of the *Mary Watson*. But she moved faster than even they had reckoned.

Her beam flashed by. Her foam-drenched combing went next, so close to the sharp prow of the freighter that the wash, compressed between the two, catapulted straight up high into the air and crashed upon the freighter's forepiece.

Captain Lowrie said, in a quite low voice, "We'll hit her stern, sure." Automatically, he braced himself.

The other men seemed to be caught in a sort of paralysis.

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IT CAME. It was dull, not sharp. For all they knew, it might have been the foul blow of a chance sea. But they felt it distinctly.

A tremor ran through the *Mary Watson's* spine. Captain Lowrie found himself on the exposed port wingtip of the bridge, shouting wildly. Bruno, inside, telegraphed the engineroom to stand by.

There was no sound of broken wood No sound, in fact, except the great roaring silence which swelled in their ears. The freighter paused, her screws stilled, and lolled there in the glassy interim which divided the crests.

Bruno stuck out his head from within the bridge. "Where did she go?" he yelled. "Where did she go?"

But Captain Lowrie could not answer that question, for he did not know himself. Where had she gone indeed? Captain Lowrie had seen her gaunt black stern go off the starboard, the windows high in the transom all soundlessly shattered. He had seen the gaping gash in her combing and bowline, where the *Mary Watson* had eaten into the planking.

But when the three-master was definitely a-starboard, she seemed to burn with a pale, mysterious moonlight; and in a few moments she was gone again, completely, gracefully, the seas slowly merging into every part of her, until there was nothing left but sea, all around where she had been.

From the wingtip where he stood, Captain Lowrie could fancy that he had seen that great Dutchman at the helm give one last lusty wave before the night swallowed him alive.

"We sank her!" Bruno cried.

"We sank nothing," Captain Lowrie replied. "Is Mr. McNulty standing by?"

"Aye, sir."

"Keep him standing by. Prepare to heave to for the night. I'll not let another inch of ocean fly past my barnacles until I can see by the light of day just where I'm going."

"We've got to stand by anyway, sir," Bruno said. "She's gone down. There'll be survivors perhaps."

"There'll be no survivors."

"If we could only have gotten her name," Bruno faltered. "We could have radioed Cape Town."

"Radio no one, mind you. Radio no one, Mr. Bruno. No word of this to get about until we see what's what."

DAWN was long delayed; but it had a sun when it did come up. In that first cold light of dawn—and there is no colder light than the first sunless break of day upon a sea—Bruno went forward with some of the crew to inspect the damage to the bow. When he returned, his face was a picture of complete stupefaction.

"There was no danger," Captain Lowrie told him.

Bruno's mouth worked. "Not a sign of damage, sir. Not a scratch on her paint. Nothing, sir."

Captain Lowrie nodded. Ahead of him, the sun broke from the rim of the horizon, yellow and glaring. "Aye", he muttered, as if to himself. "First he drove us to the north, off our eastern course. Then he cut across our bow to make us stop our way.

He had a purpose, the Dutchman did. One good turn deserves another. Me, speaking offhand on a dark and stormy night, offering him a tow, wherever he might be. And him to reciprocate, out of a black dark sea, and maybe save my command."

Bruno looked perplexed. "I don't understand, sir," he said.

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"There are some things beyond understanding," Captain Lowrie said. "Send a lookout aloft and tell him to keep a weather eye peeled, and signal Mr. McNulty to proceed at dead slow until he gets further orders."

The lookout went aloft, squatting in the crow's nest high above the bridge. Slowly and stubbornly, the *Mary Watson* ploughed along.

They did not have to wait long. By the time the sun had detached itself from the rim of the sea, painting their faces a strange saffron color, the lookout reported. From the crow's nest, in the windless quiet of the morning, his excited cry dropped down on Bruno, who stood beneath him on the boatdeck.

"Whale, ho!" the lookout bellowed.

"Where away?" Mr. Bruno replied.

"Dead ahead," said the lookout. "Just rolling there. I can hardly see him. It's the rim of his spine above water, and nothing more!"

BRUNO instantly relayed this news to the bridge. The *Mary Watson* paused in her stride and then stopped, dauntedly. Captain Lowrie, peering through his binoculars, finally found the hump in the ocean. He stared at it for a long time. "Whale, my eye!" he grunted. "Have a look, Mr. Bruno."

Bruno accepted the glasses eagerly. He peered through them for a long time, too. Finally he said, in a hollow voice, "You're right, sir. That's no whale. It's a hulk, a floating derelict, and from what I see of her upturned keel she's a big one."

Captain Lowrie nodded. "Two hundred feet of her, at least," he said reflectively. "And all her wood probably water-logged. Nice to have struck upon her. You might just as well have put dynamite in our bow, for the hole she would have torn there."

"An old clipper ship, sir," Franklin hazarded.

"Maybe so, mister," Captain Lowrie said. "I ain't seen a keel like that in a long, long time."

Bruno's face held an odd expression. He ruminated slowly, "The storm must have driven her northward. That would have put her more to the south a few hours back. If we had continued in our eastbound track, we might have struck her.

"Then we turned north. But the wind and waves were blowing her north, too. Good Lord, sir, it gives me the creeps to think of what might have happened if we had not hove to until daybreak."

"Thanks to the Dutchman, and a ready tow for him," said Captain Lowrie soberly. "Whether he be in the seas of Heaven, or in the oceans of Hell."

"It's a strange thing," Bruno said, his eyes smoky with thought. "A very strange thing. And not the sort of thing a man can tell his wife in Boston when he sees home again."

CAPTAIN LOWRIE nodded. "Right, mister. And you only to be ridiculed and laughed at for the telling of such a tale. And if your hair were a mite gray, the younger blades might be calling *you* an old fool, too."

"It could have been a mirage," Bruno said, as if he didn't believe it himself.

"It could have been," Captain Lowrie agreed. "But mirage or no, it did its work, and all of us should be grateful for it. Helmsman, point her head off that wreck. Mr. Bruno, you may telegraph Mr. NcNulty to proceed at half speed.

"Mr. Franklin, will you kindly stop by at the radio shack and tell Sparks to wireless Cape Town, a warning to

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all shipping in the vicinity of Good Hope. Give the location of the wreck and our present position. That will do. As for myself, I'm going below. If I'm needed, you've only to call me up again."

Bruno stared through the weather-break as the freighter gained way again. "Look," he said, "look off there! Porpoises. A whole school of them!"

At the door, Captain Lowrie paused. There was a faint smile on his face. "And what does that mean, mister?" he asked.

"It means, sir," replied Bruno quietly, "that we shall have good passage from here to Zanzibar."

"Aye." Captain Lowrie nodded, and he went out. But as he went, you could see by the expression on his face that he was very well pleased with his first officer.

The Light That Sailed

RELIEF is in sight (and none too soon!) for the harassed airplane pilot, bewildered by an increasing number of dials, instruments, and gadgets that he is supposed to be watching and fiddling with all the time.

What with instruments on the floor, the walls, and the ceiling of the cockpit on the newest transports, things have almost gotten to the point where the pilot will have to move out to make room for gauges. A man of softer mental fiber, put in such surroundings, would probably be singing nursery rhymes backwards in less than an hour of flying.

But the Sperry Gyroscope Company, after two years of study and experimental work, seems to have licked the problem with a device whose actual functioning is absurdly simple. Loosely called a "flight ray," the thing is analogous to a radio's electric eye, which shows the exact point at which the tuning is right. More simply still, it might be compared to an ordinary spirit level used by carpenters.

Actually the device is an application of the cathode ray tube, which is being used in television to operate behind the screen and pick out moving objects. For airplanes this principle is worked out as "a single indicating instrument which will bring together the data of all the necessary instruments and will show the flight information on its face in a pictorial manner."

On the dashboard of the plane, directly in front of the pilot, there is a softly luminous screen. Visible on this screen is the miniature silhouette of a plane, cut through its center by a vertical and a horizontal line. These are fixed, stationary.

Two other lines and a circle, arranged in exactly the same way, move about the screen as the plane veers from its course, but center precisely with the stationary figure when the flight is accurate. The pilot need not look at any other instruments in order to keep his ship in the groove.

—*Robin Townley*

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, drive a lovely car, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You, too, may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you, too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 151, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use, too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 151, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

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The Battle of Dabbit Run

By JIM KJELGAARD
Author of "The Grass Grows Again", "Mudhole Pilot", etc.

Joe was mad. He slashed out and hit Dolf Burgen on the end of the nose

Ringside report of a remarkable benefit performance in which—for the first time in their lives—two gorillas got all the fighting they wanted. In attendance, the entire male population of Dabbit Run—with one exception

DABBIT RUN wasn't a peaceful community, but it was a tightly knit one. Its inhabitants fought each other frequently, but these were always intimate little battles with no regret for spilled gore and no grudges afterward. Fifteen minutes after they wiped the blood from their noses, any two Dabbit Runners would split a bottle of beer.

For the most part the Dabbit Run men were lean and wiry, adapted to mountains in which they lived. Such a build made mostly for *blitzkrieg,* lightning war, with no heavy reserves to consolidate any advantages that might be won.

There were only two men in Dabbit Run who'd tip the scales at over two hundred. These were Pop Farr, who had lived in Dabbit Run so long he had finally become accepted as a Dabbit Runner, and old Andy Clark.

Thus when the Burgen boys crossed Dabbit Run they were not defeated in their first fight.

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One quarter drunk, the Burgen boys came from a lumber camp in the Loft country with two months' pay in their pockets and in their minds a yen to raise as much cain as possible. They had a little scrimmage in the bunkhouse before they left, just enough to whet their appetites and leave a few battered heads behind them. Then they drank the rest of the hard cider in the camp keg, threw the keg through a horse stall, and started with two quarts of applejack to assist them over the rougher stages of the trip.

They crossed the Loft country at night, struck over Wing Gap, and into Patten County. Dawn was just breaking when they came out the last ridge to the head of the Dabbit Run road. Except for their continual roaring, which was a misdirected effort to sing, Dabbit Run might never have known that they had passed if Joe Nesbitt's collie hadn't been lying in the road.

Joe was a quiet kid who had finished his hitch in the navy and come home to work Grandma Nesbitt's little farm. He worked hard, poached game and fish only when necessary to help out on the grocery bills, and never bothered anybody. He adored Grandma Nesbitt, who had given him the farm to do with as he wanted, and liked second best to roam the hills with his collie, Chief.

Joe had bought the collie in a pet store in New York on his way home. But Chief, in spite of the handicap of a metropolitan birth, was shaping into a regular Dabbit Run dog. He'd herd cows, hunt squirrels, or do anything else Joe wanted him to.

Wayne McCloud had had some hopes of letting Chief hunt deer—because he trailed silent and so wouldn't attract the game warden's atention—but Joe had kicked and Wayne hadn't pressed the point.

CHIEF had come into the road to warm himself in the early morning sun. He saw the Burgen boys coming, but the hand of no human being had ever been raised violently against him. He wagged his tail amiably and settled deeper into the dust to let them pass.

But the Burgens four hundred and ninety-two pounds of brawn and muscle, were in no mood to turn aside for a dog. Dolf Burgen put his hands on his hips.

"Hit's a skyhoot," he announced. "A dawg. A hound."

"So 'tis," Bell Burgen agreed, his head cocked aside. "Hit's a woolly dawg, too."

He drew his foot back and let it fly forward. But the effect of the half gallon of hard cider had not worn off and the two quarts of liquor they had finished at the head of the Dabbit Run road did not help Bell's sense of equilibrium any. His hobnailed boot skidded over the resting collie, hitting Chief hard enough to injure his dignity but failing to break his back. Howling, Chief fled towards the house.

Joe Nesbitt happened to be standing on the porch with an arm full of kindling wood. Joe was twenty-five years old, and had never in his life been mad before. But nobody had ever kicked any of his dogs before either. Joe dropped the kindling wood and pursued the Burgen boys.

"You kicked my dog!" Joe's cheeks were as hot as his words.

Dolf Burgen turned around. "Hit's alive!" he ejaculated. "Hit moves!"

Joe got madder. Aside from Grandma, Chief was all he had in the world to care about and to care about him. Joe didn't care what they might do to him, but they couldn't kick Chief and get away with it. He slashed out with

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his right hand and hit Dolf Burgen on the end of the nose.

Dolf roared, and launched his two hundred and forty-eight pounds at Joe's one hundred and thirty-five. Joe hit him again and danced aside. Joe hit him on the back of the neck and sent Dolf staggering. There wasn't too much size to Joe, but what there was was muscle.

But it was an unequal battle, a rifleman against tanks.

Joe hit Dolf again, and came back with a left to Bell's face. But both brothers were united now in an effort to brush from their path this rash mosquito that had challenged them. They used Loft country tactics, which begin where the Marquis of Queensbury said stop.

A haymaker Bell brought around put Joe cold into the ditch. Dolf kicked him a couple of times as he fell and they went on.

GRANDMA NESBITT, a little old lady who weighed ninety pounds with her winter coat on and who looked frail but wasn't, came down to get Wayne McCloud.

For the first time in his life Wayne saw Grandma without her habitual air of a great many things to be done and only a very short time to do them all. Joe was the only Nesbitt left out of what had been a big family.

"Joe's been hurt, Wayney," she said, trying to keep her voice from faltering and not being able to.

"Bad?" Wayne looked at her gravely.

"I don't know," Grandma said shakily. "He drug hisself to the house, an' he's sittin' there now sayin' he ain't hurt. But his face ain't right an' there's blood on his mouth. He won't leave me touch him. I do wish you'd come up."

That was proof of a grave situation. Grandma, with her "yarbs" and cures, presided over every sick bed in Dabbit Run. Only when she found a situation that she could not handle, once in a thousand times, did she ask outside aid.

Wayne walked back with her, and found Joe sitting shakily on a kitchen chair with his left hand probing the sympathetic Chief for injuries.

"How do you feel?" Wayne asked.

Joe Nesbitt glanced up. "I feel aw' right. I'd of licked both them possums, too, if I hadn't slipped."

Wayne laid Joe on a cot and stripped his clothes off. There was a bruise on his hip where Dolf's boot had landed, his four lower ribs sagged under pressure, and his right arm was broken. The blood in his mouth came from a cut tongue.

"What happened?" Wayne inquired.

"They kicked Chief!" Joe sputtered indignantly. "They was comin' down the road an' they kicked Chief!"

Wayne nodded. He knew what he himself would do if somebody kicked his dog. Wayne hadn't seen anybody go down the road, but the marks on Joe bespoke fighters from the Loft country where they put everything but sledges into their fighting.

"You're gonna be laid up for some little time, Joe," Wayne announced. "You got a couple of smashed ribs and such like."

"Don't be foolish," Joe Nesbitt protested. "There's plantin' to be done."

"You ain't goin' to do it," Wayne said firmly. "There's not much tellin' what might happen if you go shakin' them ribs around." He looked at Grandma. "See that he lays up, Granny. Don't worry about the rest and don't let him."

"I'll do that, Wayney," Grandma Nesbitt promised. Wayne looked at her

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jaw, set the same way he had seen it a lot of times before, and he knew that Joe wouldn't do any planting or anything else until it was fitting that he should.

Wayne walked out on the porch. It was a serious situation, reaching beyond any injuries Joe might have. Injuries healed, but those who didn't plant in the spring in Dabbit Run didn't eat in the fall except such as the neighbors brought in; and that was robbing the neighbors.

Dabbit Run didn't give food to its children with such a lavish hand that anything could be wasted. It was a full-time job for any Dabbit Run man to support his family, and what they parted with must be at the expense of that family. Whatever those who were ill or injured needed was provided freely, but only at a sacrifice.

The law—not the legal statutes that never worried any Dabbit Runner but the unwritten law—said those responsible for the ill should pay for the cure. But how? The lumberjacks from the Loft didn't care two whirls of a buzz saw for anything that happened to any Dabbit Runner

Head lowered, deep in thought, Wayne walked down the dusty road. The marks of the hobnail in the Burgen's boots were plain before his eyes. They were headed for Bradby. That, Wayne decided, was where they would be until their money was gone. Most of it would find its way into Al Drenk's money till.

Wayne pondered. There were plenty of men in Dabbit Run who would plant the Nesbitts' fields for nothing; but they would have to take time needed for their own planting to do it. The money the Burgens would waste in Bradby would beyond a doubt be enough to hire a man.

Persuading the Loft Boys to hire a man for the Nesbitt's would be about as easy as persuading a fighting bear not to play rough. The Loft was famous for its fighting men, and though the Loft boys never cared how fast they poured out their money after being cooped up in the Loft all winter long, they did expect value received for it in liquor, fighting, and general ruckus.

Wayne walked up the road to where Pop Farr lived with twenty-one assorted cats in a farmhouse whose owner had not been able to cope with Dabbit Run and had left it. He talked with Pop for half an hour.

"The fight will be at Sandy Dickson's barn, admission free," he said as he left. "Men only. You and Andy Clark be there by nine o'clock tonight."

SHORTLY before six o'clock that night Wayne walked into Bradby, a town of two thousand. It wasn't overrun with lumberjacks on their spring benders because it was located at some distance from the lumber woods. However, there were enough to liven things up nicely and keep the respectable residents indoors.

On the main street Wayne passed four lumberjacks walking together. Their rig told him that they were from an outfit over in the Buckhead Country, and discolored eyes on three of them told plainly that there were Loft boys in town.

Only two of the Loft boys were in town because only two had come down Dabbit Run. Wayne continued on up the main street, and ducked down a flight of stairs that led to Al Drenk's combined saloon and headquarters for whatever other business Al might see fit to transact.

Al's was the unofficial home for the

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Loft boys in Bradby. They always wrecked the place before they left, and all except the uninitiated knew enough to steer wide of it when the Loft boys were there. But Al could still make a profit because the Loft boys always came with at least a couple of months' pay and always left broke.

Wayne opened the door and slipped into the dimly lit basement. Al Drenk, standing behind a wooden bar the front of which had been kicked in, read his paper and smoked a cigar. He glanced up and down again when Wayne came in. The only sure way to stay out of war when the Loft boys took his place over was to observe a strict neutrality.

The Burgen brothers, on the whole, had been having rather a spiritless time. So far there had been only the Buck Head crew to resist them, and the Buck Headers had fled after only a short skirmish.

Two rash Bradbyites, who had requested the Burgens to betake themselves and their cow-like voices to other parts of the town, had been chased inside and their homes besieged for an hour in the hope that they would come out. Bradby's lone policeman remained discreetly within his jail waiting for the state police to cruise through and give him a hand.

The Burgens had come back to Al's saloon to drown their sorrows in as much as possible of Al's rank-smelling, but high-powered liquor. They sat at the table staring sullenly through heavy-lidded eyes as Wayne approached.

"You been havin' a good time?" Wayne inquired amiably.

"What's it to ya?" Dolf Burgen growled.

"Plenty," Wayne continued calmly. "On your way through Dabbit Run this mornin', you two beat up a boy."

"Oh," Bell Burgen furrowed his brow as he strove to recollect. "That wasn't no fight."

"Hit's our business," Dolph sneered.

"Well, it's my business too," Wayne said. "He ain't in any shape to do his spring plantin'. You two are goin' back to see what you can do about it."

BELL BURGEN rose to his feet, the happy light of battle in his eyes. "You wanta fight?" he demanded. "Come on. I'll fight you alone."

Dolf Burgen tensed himself for a spring at Wayne's legs. Wayne sighed heavily. He could, he guessed, like Bell if given half a chance. Bell was merely full of excess energy and high spirits. But Wayne could never like Dolf. Dolf had a streak of cruelty in him, was a man who hurt things to see them squirm.

Wayne's hand went beneath his canvas jacket and when it came out it held a sawed off shotgun with a ten-inch barrel. The Burgen boys relaxed.

"I'm not goin' to fight you," Wayne said. "I ain't a total fool. But if either of you thinks I ain't the boss here, all you got to do is say so."

"Whada'ya gonna do about it?" Dolf growled.

"You left a crippled boy in Dabbit Run this mornin'," Wayne repeated. "That's got to be squared up."

"Whadda'ya think we are?" Dolf said. "The Red Cross?"

"I wouldn't say what I think you are," Wayne observed, "even in here. You come down from the Loft to fight, didn't you? All right. You think you're fighters. We think you're wind bags. Do you dare come back and fight?"

"Why didn't you say it was a fight?" Bell Burgen complained. "I was just sayin' to Dolf, I never did see this town so dead."

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"Wait a minute," Dolf raised a hand. "What's the rest of it, mister?"

"You got any money left?" Wayne asked.

The Burgen's rummaged in their pockets and spewed a pile of rumpled bills out on the table. Bell counted it painfully.

"Ninety-two dollars," he summed up.

Wayne fingered the nickel and the three coppers in his own pocket. Ninety-two dollars was a lot of money in Dabbit Run, but he knew the boys would put it up if he asked them to.

He hesitated another moment. If they did put it up, and he lost it, he would be responsible for paying it back. Nobody in Dabbit Run could afford to lose anything. But he had done this much; he might as well make it whole hog or none.

"We'll match that in Dabbit Run," he said. "We'll bet ninety-two dollars you get all the fightin' you want. If after the fight you can stand up and howl for more, we'll pay up an' no hard feelin's. If you can't, you pay up an' no hard feelin's either. Old man Kinsley'll hold the money. Agreed?"

"Good enough," Dolf Burgen growled. "Come on. And you can put that scatter gun away, mister."

"I can, but I guess I won't," Wayne said. "It ain't as though I don't trust you boys, but I'll just walk behind you."

THERE were seventy-six men—except for Joe Nesbitt the total adult male population of Dabbit Run—in Sandy Dickson's barn when Wayne and the Burgen boys got there.

The barn was lit by lanterns hung on overhead beams. Fresh straw was spread four feet deep on the floor. The Dabbit Runners were perched in the hay mow, on the beams, on top of the granary, and in any other place big enough to accommodate a man. They stared curiously down on the Burgens, but made no comment.

Wayne led the Burgens to the granary against which they stood smirking at as much of the crowd as they could see and making various uncouth noises in their throats.

Wayne walked to the center of the floor. "We got to raise ninety-two dollars," he announced. "Pat Rooney'll pass around with a hat and a hunk of paper. I'll be responsible for the money. If all of you give what you got, an' mark it down on the paper, I'll see that you get it back after the Burgen boys get licked."

'Haw!" Dolf sneered. "I'll take the hul lot of you on down here now."

"Who'm I gonna fight?" Bell inquired eagerly. "I never in my hull life had enough fightin'."

"You will this time," Wayne assured him dryly.

Wayne crossed the barn floor, and from the shadows on the other side led Pop Farr and old Andy Clark. Pop was sixty and was beginning to add fat around the middle, though he was still strong. Andy was almost as old, bald, and with one eye blinded by bird shot twenty years before. Bell Burgen stared at them.

"*These* the ones?" he asked, disappointedly. "Shucks. I thought it was gonna be a real fight."

"Better lemme have 'em both at once," Dolf Burgen said.

"Shut up," Wayne commanded. "These are the only two we got of a size with you. If you think they can't fight, you're crazy. The rules are, you fight two at a time. The two who ain't fightin' stay in where they can't watch either. Each man fights buck naked,

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with a sack over his head so's nobody'll know who it is an' there can't be no help from the side lines, such as chuckin' things under the feet of the man somebody might'nt favor. Fair enough?"

The four shrugged their agreement. Pat Rooney came back with the hat full of dollar bills and loose change. Wayne counted out ninety-two dollars in front of Dolf Burgen, and held the hat while Dolf matched it with a similar amount. Wayne gave the hat to old man Kinsley.

"All right," Wayne said. "Pop, you an' Bell Burgen come with me into the granary. Andy, you an' Dolf go with Pat Rooney into that box stall. Only Pat an' me knows who we'll bring back on the floor—who's fightin' who: The fight will be with no holds or punches barred."

With an audible intake of breath the gallery turned their heads from the granary door to the box stall. After five minutes Pat Rooney came out of the stall, his hand clasping the arm of a huge and hairy figure with a sack drawn over its head and tied at the neck.

Pat waited until Wayne, leading another figure, came out of the granary. Slowly Pat and Wayne advanced toward each other until the figures they led were able to touch hands. Then Pat and Wayne ducked.

IN THE straw on the barn floor a hurricane of major proportions instantly took form. The man Wayne had led leaped into the air and planted his heels in his opponent's abdomen. The other grunted, staggered two steps backwards, but reached his hands out in time to grasp the feet. He jerked as hard as he could and the kicker went prone in the straw.

Headlong the other hurled himself on his prostrate enemy, but the kicker wriggled aside and he landed in the straw. A howl of merriment arose from the audience as the first raised his foot to kick a second time and kicked so hard in the wrong direction that he upset himself again.

Both rose to their feet. A muffled roar arose from under one of the sacks and the other sack hurled himself at it.

Shoulder to shoulder they came together and made a dozen wild swings in the air. A continuous angry growling emanated from both sacks as the combatants began to get a sense of time and distance. They stopped swinging wildly and began to fence cautiously, their arms extended.

One backed until he was against the five-foot wall of the hay mow. He felt about with his foot, testing his position and making sure that there was a solid wall at his back. He bellowed a joyful battle challenge. The other, arms still extended, approached and cut loose with a terrific haymaker that landed squarely on top of the first man's head.

That one countered with a right that connected sharply with his opponent's chin, rocking his head and sending him to his knees. He came up again. Shoulder to shoulder they stood in a wild slugging orgy, hammering each other with sledge-like blows, pounding happily but mercilessly until blood stained both sacks, but not bringing their feet into play for fear of losing balance.

They kept up that steady, savage pounding, neither man giving way, for what seemed to be an endless time, and the only sounds in the barn were the thud of their fists and their rasping, muffled breathing.

Then, still fighting, the man against the hay mow sank to his knees.

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The other cut the air where he had stood with a wild swing. Sensing that his opponent had gone down, he felt cautiously for him. His hand was seized in a grip from which strength was fast draining. There was a quick jerk. His head collided suddenly with the hay mow, and together the two wilted into the straw.

Wayne leaped down to cut the sack from one man's head and reveal the battered face of Dolf Burgen. He cut the other sack away to show the equally gory face of Bell Burgen.

CHARLEY GALE, in his battered pick-up truck, took the Burgen boys back to the Loft country and sent them on their way toward the camp where they worked. Wayne McCloud took the ninety-two dollars, to be used in hiring a man until Joe was well, to Grandma Nesbitt.

He didn't mention any details, but simply told Grandma that the Burgens had heard about what they did to Joe and wanted to make amends. Grandma took the money and asked no questions —always the wisest procedure in Dabbit Run. And everybody seemed satisfied.

Everybody, Wayne thought, should be. The Burgens had wanted plenty of fighting and had got it. The Nesbitts wanted their crops planted, and they would be. Dabbit Run wanted excitement and had found it. Yes: nobody had lost anything excepting maybe Al Drenk who had wanted all the Burgens' money and hadn't got it.

But Al Drenk didn't count in Dabbit Run.

JUST ACROSS THE TRACKS!

A familar phrase in many American towns and cities. *What does it mean?* It means that there is a *"Railroad Avenue"* in that town. It means that the municipality is one of the strong links in a mighty iron chain stretching thousands of miles beyond the town limits to connect it with the nation. Nearly everybody remembers a *"Railroad Avenue"* and the important part it once played in their lives. Read *"Railroad Avenue"* by Edward Samples, a human, vital story of a street like the one you remember. *Read of its people . . . its romance, its comedies and tragedies that might belong in any town—in your town.* Read it in April

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The Green Flame

A strange cone of smoke hovered over the house. From the firemen's hoses came dreadful living flame

By ERIC NORTH

ON MY first night in Melbourne, Australia, I—MAURICE JOHN MURCHISON—saw a man destroyed by that horrible green flame with which the mysterious and loathsome TOAD proposed to bring the government of Australia to his feet.

This TOAD—presumably a brilliant chemist in possession of some secret formula unknown to science—had written threatening letters to the premier and others, demanding huge sums of money on pain of unspeakable catastrophe. Old STEPHEN GREGORY, director of the Bureau of Chemical Science, had set about to learn TOAD's identity—and had suffered the unearthly fate that I witnessed in Alexandra Gardens that night. Days later his shadow remained in the gravel path.

Gregory had taken the fiery poison from a little vial in which he customarily kept his usual dose of medicine—medicine prepared from herbs furnished by a Chinese herbalist. And—as we learned later—Gregory's landlady had admitted some Chinese to his room on the day of his murder, on the man's assertion that he had to arrange the herbs in a certain way.

THE premier's young secretary, GEORGE FRAMLING, pledged me to secrecy as a witness of the tragedy and the next day escorted me to a meeting at the Treasury building. There I met MORGAN HANNAFORD, the premier; PROFESSOR BRANDEN, a chemist; SIR HECTOR CORRILEES, a commissioner of police; and SENIOR-DETECTIVE RALPH HERMANN. We agreed to spare no effort in finding the identity of TOAD and bringing him to justice.

I had found a room in the house of NANCY CARLISLE, on Monray Street; and

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soon came to regard her with a feeling stronger than friendliness. By nature a cheerful and kindly person, she was deeply disturbed by the actions of her father, old RUFUS CARLISLE, a fanatic who talked eagerly of the destruction of the world by fire and flood.

He appeared to be strongly under the influence of one MERTZ, a furtive character who had formerly roomed at this house. Mertz never allowed anyone to see his face, and hid his eyes under thick-lensed glasses.

Yet on the night that Framling's wife, MONA, was decoyed from home by a phone call, she thought that the voice resembled that of Mertz. And in the terrible experience from which Nancy Carlisle and I rescued her, she was held captive *by a Chinese.* She remembered that he had red eyes. And Professor Branden, recalling a classmate in school who had been nicknamed Toad, noted that his eyes also had been red.

ON THE Sunday night after we had become engaged, Nancy and I went to services at the Cathedral. Suddenly there was a disturbance: old Rufus Carlisle (unrecognized by any but us) appeared in the balcony and began shouting about the destruction of the world. He escaped, but Nancy was terribly shaken.

When the old man returned home that night, MOLLIE HOLLIDEW, another roomer, was being visited by CUTHBERT WEINSEIDLE, her wealthy but not very brilliant suitor. Weinseidle succeeded in getting Nancy's father to bed by frightening him with the word *Satanoil.* He explained to me that he had heard Merz use the word, with surprising effects on the old man.

The next day was a momentous one. Hannaford had received another letter from TOAD, this time demanding one million pounds sterling. The letter said, "I shall call upon you at your office at eight o'clock on Monday night . . ."

Hannaford was sick on Monday; but the rest of us were there for the meeting. Tensely we sat, wondering what manner of man would come. The clock stood at ten minutes to eight. . . .

CHAPTER XII

SO WATER WON'T BURN?

THOSE ten minutes seemed an eternity of waiting. I suppose this was because every man of us was silent. The chief commissioner sat in the premier's chair, his large mouth twisted in a thoughtful grimace, and his hands clasped squarely on top of his almost bald head.

Professor Branden, thin and angular, sat at Sir Hector's elbow. He was staring into a vacancy and his lips moved soundlessly.

Hermann and Crampton were stationed one on either side of the room, close to the inner door of green baize. Their position was a strategic one and argued ill for Toad's escape by the way he would enter. The detective's farmer-like face held a grim smile, in which was blended resolve and doubt. He caught my eye and nodded briefly, as if to emphasize his scepticism.

Sir Hector broke the quiet by saying: "The ordinary messenger is in attendance outside, you said, Framling?"

"Yes," George replied. "I gave him no name. I merely instructed that a visitor might call, asking to see the premier: in which case, Baines was to show him in here. He was then to inform the two plainclothes men who are waiting in the clerks' room opposite. The three will take up a position outside the premier's door."

Sir Hector was muttering his approval of this, when the clock on the mantel chimed eight. With the last stroke, as it seemed, the baize door opened to disclose the stolid features of the messenger, Baines.

He said: "A gentleman to see the premier, sir."

"Show him in," Sir Hector snapped.

He said under his breath, darting a look at Hermann: "There's punctuality for you. Now, gentlemen, watch yourselves."

His face was set.

Hermann's astonishment was plain to see. In spite of his careful preparations, he had never really expected

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Toad to keep the appointment. Nor, I think, had any of us but myself. But mine had been intuition rather than a reasoning of probabilities.

I was still tasting my fortuitous triumph when Toad came into the room.

Three times I have attempted to draw a pen portrait of this man—as we saw him then, for the first time, openly—and three times I have scored out what I have written. The truth is that Toad somehow defies description. The likeness is here at the back of my mind, but I cannot focus it.

Let me try once more.

He was short and squat; globular face, with high, bushy brows, a wide straight slit of a mouth, and flattened nostrils. His cheekbones were oblique, Eastern. A short, dun-colored down—scarcely to be described as hair—covered his skull. The flesh of his throat was in folds.

No; I have failed again. This reads as the description of some animal, not of a man. Let it stand, in all its crude, unhuman ugliness. Add to this the eyes: large, with drowsy lids, and pouched below the eyeballs; a flame-colored iris . . .

THIS was the face that confronted us presently from across the premier's table. I was reminded of some carnival mask set upon thick, humping shoulders — coldly impassive, fascinating in its superlative arrogance.

Sir Hector Corrilees said curtly: "You are Toad?"

The voice which replied was smooth, yet concise and faintly ironic.

"I am Toad. But you are not the premier."

"Mr. Hannaford is ill," Sir Hector said, in his quick, uncompromising tones. "He deputed me to hear what you have to say."

A little curious sound escaped Professor Branden. He was staring at Toad intently, his mouth hung open and his brows were frowning. Suddenly he appeared to grasp the thought in his mind. He pointed a lean, accusing finger.

"I remember you now. You're Michael Domidorf. Of course. How stupid of me to forget . . ."

Toad said: "I was always just ahead of you in class, Branden, wasn't I? I'm still ahead, you see."

This, I believe, was the keynote to the man—his insane egotism. His crazy genius stood astride his world of self, and fretted to stand astride the souls of men. He lusted for power, like some demoniac demigod, and felt the scepter of it already in his hands.

"Domidorf . . ."

"Toad, at your service, Branden."

"Toad, then . . ." Branden's voice rose thinly. "Your criminal lunacy might be expected to welcome even the perversion of a name. What hellish thing did you do to Stephen Gregory? Answer me that, before we call you to account . . ."

The flicker of a smile crossed Toad's face.

"You're hysterical, Branden. Gregory brought about his own death. As well blame your Maker when the lightning strikes you."

"You're not omnipotent."

"So near to that, Branden," Toad said unemotionally, "that I can afford to overlook your childishness."

Sir Hector Corrilees interrupted.

"Branden, please. Now, you Toad, as you style yourself. I hardly believed that you'd be brazen enough, for all your hardihood, to put yourself so completely in our hands. Of that we'll talk later. We'll hear first what you have to say."

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Again that flicker of a smile.

"Brave words, Corrilees, but they won't help you. Why, you fools, I hold you in the hollow of my hand. I can destroy you and your world. The earth is mine and the fullness thereof. I shall take toll of the nations. And no man dare lift his hand against me, lest I wreck the universe. Power, Branden—that's what I hold."

A MADMAN, plainly. And yet the thought brought no comfort. If he had ranted. . . . But his voice was not even raised in emphasis. He might have been stating plain, everyday facts, for all of his cold, balanced unemotion. Only his eyes betrayed the exultation of his thought. Their flame seemed to ebb and flow.

Sir Hector Corrilees was unpleasantly amused. It was evident that now he thought he knew precisely the kind of man with whom we were dealing.

He said, glancing at Hermann: "So that's it, is it? Well, Hermann, I don't think we need wait any longer, do you? We can't hang you, Toad, but we can do the next best thing. We can put you where your destructive notions can't do any harm. And we'll do it now."

His strong teeth bit the end from a cigar. He looked at Framling and me, as much as to say: "Well, all the upset is over. The premier is going to be mighty relieved to hear the truth of it."

Hermann and Frampton had come quietly forward. They stood each at Toad's elbow, the very incarnation of stern, relentless officialdom. Hermann had a pair of handcuffs in his hand. He was grinning a little. He even allowed himself to joke.

He said: "Now, then, Napoleon, you're keeping the court waiting. And there's the battle of Waterloo to be seen to."

"Wait," Toad said quietly.

Some quality in his voice struck the grin from Hermann's face. Sir Hector sensed it, too, for he paused in the lighting of his cigar, to peer uncertainly at Toad.

"Do you think," the smooth, chill voice proceeded, "that I was so incredibly stupid as not to foresee this action on your part? I have taken all precautions against it. This will be plainer when I have demonstrated what I have come to demonstrate.

"I said that I would produce incontestable proof of my right to dictate not only to this Government, but to the governments and peoples of the entire earth. Incidentally, Branden's curiosity may obtain a hint as to the method of Gregory's death."

"And suppose we prefer not to see this precious demonstration?" Sir Hector said.

Toad replied, with a careless shrug of his shoulders: "In that case you will precipitate the most stupendous calamity which has ever fallen upon mankind. I warn you, I am perfectly sane and serious."

The allusion to Gregory, I could see, had caught the attention of Professor Branden. He was all a-quiver, in a scientific sense, to establish the identity of the amber fluid.

He said: "A little further delay, Sir Hector, can hardly matter. If there is any demonstration, however absurd, it might not be amiss to have it."

I smile sadly now when I think of our cocksureness. For the moment, even my fears had been calmed. I was seeing Toad as a bombastic lunatic who had poisoned Gregory by means of some obscure chemistry and was threatening to poison us all in the pursuit of his monstrous ambitions. Of the shocking truth I had no conception.

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"As you please," said Sir Hector.

"Thank you. Will some one bring me water, preferably in an iron basin. Not more than a tumblerful. Also, allow me—for your sakes, rather than my own—to stand here, a little apart."

At Sir Hector's nod Hermann and Crampton drew away a few paces. Framling left the room to obtain what was required.

Hermann said bluntly: "No tricks. There are six of us here, and there are men posted inside and outside the building. You can't get away. Besides, at the first sign of any funny business, I shall shoot to kill."

"When I leave here, as I shall shortly, it will be by myself and with your full permission," Toad said.

Hermann sneered incredulously.

Framling came back with a small enamel basin. He said, as he handed this to Toad: "Is that enough water?"

"A little too much," Toad said. He poured some into the fireplace, and set the basin on a chair.

HE TURNED then to Branden, the red of his eyes glowing. "Branden, what would you say if I told you that I could burn water?"

"What!" Branden exclaimed.

Suddenly he laughed outright in thin, reedy tones. He said, "Are you as mad as that? I'm sorry, Sir Hector; I've wasted your time after all."

"Wait," Toad said. "Suppose you tell us, Branden, why water will not ignite, as the world understands ignition."

Branden said mechanically: "Every child knows that water will not burn because it cannot combine with the oxygen of the atmosphere. That is a scientific fact."

"Allow me then to introduce you to Satanoil," Toad said.

Some small object—I could not distinguish what it was—fell from his hand into the basin. Immediately he stepped away from it, his palms before his eyes.

Satanoil! . . . For a second I had a vision of old Rufus Carlisle kneeling at the piano stool, with Cuthbert's face lowered to speak that very word. Satanoil . . . Satanoil . . . The full meaning of the name burst upon me.

And as instantaneously the thing itself burst upon our astounded senses. From the basin shot a single wide tongue of jade-green flame, edged with bright orange. It rose three or four feet in the air and spread like a fan. There was no noise of its burning, but the room was pervaded by a sudden enormous sensation of heat. I could hear the tiny cracking of the enamel lining the basin, which seemed to rock on the chair.

As swiftly as it had come, so the flame died. Nothing remained but a thin green haze immediately over the basin. My eyes were paining in the way they had pained once before, when I had incautiously looked at the flame of an oxy-acetylene welding process. There was a faint acridness in the air.

Professor Branden's face was aghast. He said: "What—what—what—" over and over like a child.

Beyond that was the silence of utter consternation. Sir Hector Corrilees was breathing like a man in a fit. Crampton was wiping tears of hurt from his eyes, while Framling's face was buried in his hands.

On this silence came the smooth voice of Toad.

"When I said I had taken precautions against my arrest here tonight, I might have said that they had to do with this thing that I call Satanoil. How do you like the name, Branden?

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"Never mind that now. The poin is this. Should I not return to a certain place by midnight tonight, what happened in the basin will happen in the river.

"I need say no more. You have imagination enough to visualize the picture. Fresh water or salt, a drop of Satanoil will do for it what one match will do for a forest. The river runs to the ocean, and the ocean to other oceans. Touch me and the world burns. You begin to understand at last the power I wield.

"AND now for my terms. You shall pay me one million pounds as Victoria's share in the price of the world's immunity. I have done with playing. I give you one week to consent. If at this hour today a week the acceptance of the government is not notified to me through the columns of the press, I shall punish swiftly. And I shall go on punishing until my will is done."

"You devil!" Branden choked.

Sir Hector Corrilees seemed to rouse himself from a state of stupefaction.

He said hoarsely: "What guarantee do we have that even if we agree to this preposterous sum in payment, further demands will not be made on us?"

For the first time Toad ceased to smile.

"None. If it's my will you go on paying. The world pays or perishes. You talk of the great kings of the earth! Bah! Never a king in history such as I shall be. Science, Branden; power. Satanoil, Branden. Get over that if you can!"

Branden said: "Are you human? Was it that you murdered poor Gregory with? You black-hearted devil!"

Toad was impervious. There was no change in his cool, unangered tones.

"The wet of his veins fed the flames, Branden. As a quick and effective means of suicide I can recommend Satanoil. A drop on your tongue . . ."

I saw Hermann reach out a great hand toward him as he turned to the door. Sir Hector Corrilees saw it, too, and called harshly: "Let him go, Hermann. We daren't risk it. Tell those men outside—"

His voice broke sharply.

Toad paused, his flame-colored iris glowing from the shadowed doorway. In the dimness of my aching sight his features seemed to puff and swell.

He said: "So water won't burn, eh, Branden? Well, you're wiser now."

As he turned a hideous travesty of laughter left his lips.

CHAPTER XIII

CALLING MR. X

GEORGE FRAMLING, on his own initiative, told the mystified plain-clothes police and the messenger Baines that they were no longer required.

When he returned from doing so he drew my attention to the basin used in Toad's demonstration. The enamel lining was cracked and melted—evidence of the terrific heat to which it had been subjected. Not a vestige of moisture remained.

The green haze or smoke had also vanished. As in the case of poor Gregory, it had slowly and imperceptibly thinned into nothingness.

I could not help wondering whether here, also, the air held an imperishable photographic record of events. It seemed to me that in that confined space there was a possibility that the whole contents of the room might thus be impressed upon the atmosphere.

Given certain conditions of lighting

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and perspective, I thought, our tragic group might be reproduced—as it were, superimposed upon the room itself—long after its individual members were scattered and dead.

My theory proved correct, but in part only. This curious photogenic property of Satanoil would appear to have been limited in effect to within two or three feet of its action only. As a consequence, in this case its influence was confined to Toad—who stood nearest—and the chair and basin.

Some four times, I believe, persons have claimed since to have seen this phantom, and on this basis is founded the superstition still current that the premier's room in the Treasury buildings is haunted. The effect, I am told, is that of a short, stocky man standing, hands before his face, close to a chair holding a basin. On all four occasions the hour was around dusk and the lighting was natural.

The scientific and curious may make what they will of this phenomenon. I venture no opinion, except to state that I doubt that Toad himself was aware of it. In any event, I am certain it was beyond his designing. Professor Branden was emphatic on this point.

It was the primary property of Satanoil that was concerning him, now. I could read in his expression that he was doubting his own sanity. All his preconceived notions and precise scientific maxims had tumbled about his ears. The impossible had become possible.

Sir Hector Corrilees was striding about the room. He halted abruptly, and said: "Shocking! Shocking! A terrible power to be in the hands of any man, let alone a criminal. No man, sane or insane, is to be trusted with such power."

Framling said: "Satanoil. It's well named."

Professor Branden struck his forehead.

"Gentlemen, it violates all established principles of science. And yet—you saw it. You saw water burn. What do I say? Am I mad, myself? Corrilees—Murchison—you saw it. Say you saw it . . ."

IT WAS some time before the hysteria of his fear left him. Crampton ran for some brandy. Upon this Branden revived sufficiently to reply to Sir Hector.

The chief commissioner asked: "Can you hazard an explanation? I want to understand what I can of your point of view. Water, you told us, will not burn because it cannot be made to combine with the oxygen of the air. I take it, then, that Toad has effected this combination. Am I right?"

"How else?" Branden murmured.

He paused a moment, wetting his lips with a trembling tongue.

"The chemist distinguishes bodies into simple and compound substances. A chemical union is not merely a mixture of the components, such as would take place if we shook together white and black sand, but an entirely new substance is formed with properties utterly different from any of its constituents.

"Water—as said—to burn must combine with the oxygen of the air. It is first necessary to decompose it into its equivalent gases. But when this is done, these gases immediately combine to return to the original state—water."

Branden stared at us in turn. "And so it becomes necessary—if water is to burn—not only to decompose it into its gases, but to fix those gases for at least sufficiently long to permit their ignition. Some intermediary has to be found which frees and ignites in a con-

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tinuously evolving process. In Satanoil Toad has apparently discovered this intermediary. . . . Sir Hector, what is to be done?"

"I wish I knew," Corrilees said. His own face was gray. "We must confer at once with the premier. God help us. . . . If the world knew, it would become insane with fear. The destruction of the entire globe is at the will of one man—and that man a dangerous lunatic."

"Say, rather, perverted genius," Branden said. "In all my horror I cannot escape the brilliance of what he has done. To have achieved such a thing as that . . ."

Hermann interposed: "Professor, you addressed him as Michael Domidorf? I saw the name on the class lists and traced it, as I thought, to a harmless conclusion. Domidorf is supposed to have died ten years back. I saw the entry in the register."

"Nevertheless, as you see," Branden said, with a weary smile, "Domidorf is alive. For reasons of his own, no doubt, he preferred to be thought dead. It is not very difficult to perpetrate a fraud of that description, Hermann. A medical corpse, and a venal registrar, and the thing is done. Michael Domidorf died and some other name was taken. We must find what that other name is. Everything now, depends upon it."

"In what way?" asked Hermann.

"We have a week of truce. It is unlikely that Toad would entrust a confederate permanently with the means of so dreadful a world holocaust. Depend upon it, this confederate is ignorant of the deadly property of his task. He is told, should Toad not return at a certain hour, to do a certain thing. It is, one presumes, that he empty a certain liquid into the Yarra River.

"He is unaware of the tremendous results that will follow his act. It would be easy to deceive such a man. He might be told, for example, that the liquid was to be thus disposed of in order that it should not fall into the hands of the police."

I think we all followed this reasoning readily enough.

Hermann said, "I believe you've hit on it."

"And so, you see," Branden continued, "it is extremely improbable that Toad—fearing that in ignorance his confederate may bungle and precipitate disaster—will trust another in the intervals of his hiding. He feels tolerably safe from discovery.

"In fact, I believe this is at the bottom of the murder of poor Gregory. Toad dares not be caught at a time when he has not the safeguard of his confederate. Gregory was a threat, therefore Toad destroyed him."

"You say confederate," Sir Hector Corrilees questioned. "Why not confederates?"

"For the reasons already stated," Branden replied. "Satanoil, as Toad well knows, is too dangerous a thing to play with. A single confederate is all he needs. Domidorf, by the way, was supposed to have come to this country from Russia when a boy . . ."

AT THIS point my attention wandered. I was, in short, testing the horror of my own thought. I could no longer escape the conclusion that Nancy's father was the confederate of whom Branden had made mention.

All the facts pointed to it. If I had been sure that no other confederate existed—that old Rufus Carlisle was alone in his hideous, if unconscious, partnership of evil—I think I should have made my conclusions known to the rest.

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But I was not sure. I felt that before committing myself to a step which must inevitably bring sorrow to the girl I loved, I ought first to settle this point beyond doubt.

That is to say, I must identify Toad with Mertz. If Toad and Mertz were not one and the same, then Mertz was also a confederate. There was also the man who had masqueraded as the Chinese herbalist, Sing Wu: the man whose voice, according to Mona Framling, was like that of Mertz.

Everything was so involved that I would not risk Nancy's hurt until I saw more clearly. It might even be that Mertz, not Rufus Carlisle, was Toad's single confederate, and that the old man was merely coincident in his outburst of adventist mania. And so I decided to keep my own counsel still.

Crampton was sitting stolidly at the end of the table. Under cover of what Professor Branden was saying, I invited the park policeman to join me next day in a thorough search of the locality where Nancy had met with her adventure.

I said: "If you could get the day off, or manage between shifts, I'd like you to join me in a little tour of exploration. I want to trace a man named Mertz. We may be wasting our time, but I think not."

"I'll go," Crampton said promptly. "I can arrange to take the day, Mr. Murchison. I'll ask Sir Hector now."

The chief commissioner agreed readily.

"A good idea, Murchison. As a matter of fact, Framling has spoken of this man Mertz in connection with the attempt to abduct Mrs. Framling. I had intended to have him traced."

"We'll do that," Crampton said, nodding at me.

Poor chap. . . .

Hermann said: "I think it wise, too, to hunt in couples. I suggest that Framling and I attempt to trace the man substituted for Domidorf at the time of Domidorf's supposed death. Domidorf may have assumed this man's name."

I arranged to meet Crampton outside the Treasury at nine o'clock the next morning. I told him of the lane in Carlton, but withheld the full story of what had gone on there. I said, merely, that Mertz had been seen to enter the lane one night.

"I know the spot," Crampton said. "A bad quarter. We'll go through that district with a fine-tooth comb."

Sir Hector Corrilees and Framling left in a taxi for the premier's house. George told me later that Mr. Hannaford took the news in silence. He was still pretty sick, but his courage was unassailable.

On parting with them he merely said: "I refuse to treat with this abominable creature. Madman though he is he will not dare carry out this threat. Let us find him and destroy him, Corrilees, as one destroys a dog suffering from hydrophobia."

Sir Hector suggested that the Cabinet should share the responsibility, but the premier would not agree to this either. He declared that it would be fatal to divulge so dire a secret. The risk of publicity was too great. Only the seven pledged to defeat Toad must know it.

. . . I slept little that night. My mind rocked with horrible imaginings—pictures of a world dissolved in flame: rivers burning, oceans, everything that held moisture.

And knife-like there entered my consciousness the thought of old Rufus Carlisle. *Fire and water . . . water and fire . . . for the firmament shall pass away in flame.* His prophecy.

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What did Nancy's father know of this ghastly business?

CRAMPTON lived with his wife in a small wooden cottage on the bank of the Saltwater River. The property was their own, and stood apart from the nearest neighbor by some hundred and fifty yards. The locality is bare and bleak; at night, when the almost invariable wind is howling, it is eerie and hostile.

The Cramptons were alone in the house except for a nine-year-old granddaughter, Mary Jonas—left by their only child, a daughter who had married and died in widowhood. Mary had been formally adopted by her grandparents, who lavished upon her the affection they had known for their daughter.

These scant particulars were told to me by Crampton himself, in the course of our journey by street car to North Carlton, on the morning after our meeting with Toad. The park policeman was likable; a little heavy in conversation, perhaps, but honest as the day.

We got off two stops from the end of the line and set to work to find our bearings. As it proved, we walked some distance before discovering the site of Nancy's adventure. It was marked, she had told me, by a high tin fence on the left-hand corner of the lane, immediately to the rear of the building on the frontage.

Crampton said, "Looking for Mertz in here is going to be a slow business. We'll save time if we divide up and take a street each. Are you game to tackle it, Mr. Murchison?"

"Why not?" I asked.

"All right," Crampton said. "You take the street ahead and I'll start in further back. We'll meet at the other end of the lane. Just one word of warning. Don't go inside any of the houses. Any you think worth a look over, make a note of them. We'll go through them together."

I began to appreciate the unsavory lot of the canvasser in mean localities, as I progressed with my task. Progressed is hardly the right word in my own case: retrogressed would describe it more accurately.

I met denial at every door. No one knew the name. Some said so civilly enough; others with abuse. It was plain, in any case, that I was viewed with suspicion.

None the less, I stuck to my task. When it was completed I drew a breath of relief. I had certainly drawn a blank, but the disappointment yielded to a sense of freedom. I lit a cigarette and went to find Crampton.

He was waiting for me at the entrance to the lane. He said: "What luck?"

"None. And you?"

He scratched his head.

"Why, I'm not so sure. Did you notice an old building midway along that looked as if it might once have been a factory?"

I had. The building faced upon the street Crampton had canvassed. The lot continued right through to my street, where it was fenced off with broken pickets. It was so obviously unoccupied that I had not bothered to investigate it. I said as much to Crampton.

"The old party in the cottage alongside tells me that it used to be a boot factory," Crampton said. "It's been vacant for some years. The point is, for several nights lately there has been a light in one of the windows."

"A caretaker," I suggested.

"There isn't one. She's a decent old party, this, and she tells me she was

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afraid it was a gang of roughnecks... What's the time?"

I was surprised to find that it was past noon. We had made a late start, and the morning had flown.

"We'll have a bite somewhere, and then we'll overhaul that building, Mr. Murchison."

We found a dingy cafe, and presently disputed with a horde of flies for possession of muddy coffee and some dubious sandwiches. After a brief smoke we set out for the factory.

CHAPTER XIV

A YELLOW MARBLE

IT WAS a two-storied wooden structure, very tumbledown and unprepossessing. The main doors were locked, but we gained entry by a small side door leading into what had once been a boiler house.

The door communicating with the factory proper was also locked. I was looking around for something with which to force it, when my eye fell on an opening cut in the wall, evidently for the purpose of admitting a pulley belt. The boards here were loose, and we soon forced a passage for our bodies.

We stood now in a barn-like area with a concrete floor and a number of concrete pillars. In the dim light we made out a wooden staircase rising beyond.

"Empty enough," Crampton said.

I was about to reply, when a step sounded overhead. Someone was moving about the second story. Not a doubt of it.

"Come on," Crampton said.

We tiptoed up the stairs, arriving at a small landing. To the left ran a board corridor, with here and there an open doorway showing. It marked, I thought, a one-time group of offices. Indeed, at one point projected a name board, bearing the painted inscription: *Secretary.*

Immediately before us was a closed door built of rough hardwood. Crampton tried the handle and found it fast. Upon this he knocked smartly.

"Is there anyone inside?"

There was no reply.

Crampton said, in an undertone: "Look in the other rooms."

I did so, and found them dusty and unoccupied. When I returned Crampton called again.

He said: "Police here. Open this door."

There came suddenly sounds of movement beyond. But still no reply. I seemed once to hear the clink of glass and a hurried footfall.

"Look out," Crampton said.

As I stood aside he seized a broken stair-rail and began to batter at the lock. His was, I think, one of those temperaments which find quick anger in opposition. The rail was tough and heavy, and his strength was enormous. The door fell inward within a minute, and we after it. I caught a glimpse of a man disappearing into a sort of manhole in the wall at the far end of the chamber.

"After him," Crampton roared.

His foot caught in some obstruction as he spoke, and out of the tail of my eye I saw him fall headlong. Next moment, I was through the manhole upon an outside platform.

Over my head was a great beam, with a pulley at its end, through which depended a rusty iron chain. By these means, in the days of the factory's prosperity, case goods had been lowered to the vehicles waiting in the lane below. I understood this much instinctively.

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I saw that the rusty chain was being violently agitated and peered quickly downward to discover the man we sought, lowering himself hand below hand. As I looked he released his hold, having come to the end of the chain, and dropped the short remaining distance. He picked himself up and darted around a corner out of sight, just as Crampton joined me.

I was for making chase, I remember; but Crampton withheld me.

He said: "It wouldn't be any use, Mr. Murchison. He has too great a start of us. I've never used worse strategy in my life. One of us ought to have been posted below. But it's too late to think of that now. Did you get a look at his face?"

"No," I said. "He had on a hat and overcoat, and he never once looked back. As far as I could see he was about medium height and stockily built."

"Could it have been Mertz?"

I had to confess that I had never seen Mertz.

"Toad, then?"

"It could have been Toad," I said. "It was his build. In the circumstances it might have been anybody, though."

Crampton shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll get the office to put a man on to watch this place, anyhow. I don't expect it will be much use. He was up to no good, whoever he was. He won't walk into a trap. But it's worth trying."

WE WENT back through the manhole arrangement into the room. The first thing I noticed was that one corner of it was fitted up with a number of glass jars, retorts and test tubes, after the manner of a laboratory. There was a spirit lamp and a glass retort; in a sink under a tap was a small iron crucible. There was a litter of all sorts.

I looked at the jars. Most of them were empty, but one or two contained liquid. One was labeled *Aqua Fortis;* a second *Aqua Regia;* a third *Nitrate of Silver.* The names meant nothing to me.

From Professor Branden I learned later that the first was the nitric acid of the shops, a powerful oxidizing agent, dissolving most of the metals after oxidizing them. In the anhydrous state it is in the form of six-sided prisms which become very hot in water and dissolve without disengaging any gas.

Aqua regia, Branden said, was named so by the old alchemists, because it had the property of dissolving gold and platinum. In chemistry it was a compound of nitric and muriatic acids. Nitrate of silver was a compound of nitric acid and oxide of silver, and a substance of great importance in photography.

Branden, as I have already stated, from the first suspected the presence of nitrate of silver in Satanoil, because of the extraordinary photogenic properties of this damnable amber fluid.

So far as Crampton and I were concerned, these were just some kind of acids. We left them severely alone.

The crucible was empty and quite dry. We found nothing of which we made any consequence, except what appeared to be a small yellow marble, which rolled from beneath a wad of cotton waste as Crampton lifted it.

We examined it in turn. It was made of some substance resembling celluloid, but more nearly approaching a tough papier-mâché. When it was held to the light there appeared to be a liquid within. If so, it was of a thick and oily consistency, for no amount of shaking produced the feel of liquid.

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Crampton dropped the yellow marble into his pocket.

He said: "I'll have a look at it when I get home. Something to amuse Mary."

I suggested that it would be safer, perhaps, to take the marble to Professor Branden. Crampton, however, declared that the thing was of slight importance.

"There's nothing inside it. It's probably what it looks to be—a composition marble. They stick them in kettles, you know, to keep the bottom from rusting. Anyhow, if I think different on looking it over, I'll run it along to Branden."

After all, the thing was only a yellow marble. I made sure of this. I asked Crampton to let me see it once more. I held it again to the light and satisfied myself that what we had at first supposed to be a liquid inside was nothing more than a property of transparency which reflected the light and shade.

It showed, I thought, how jumpy my mind was, that a mere marble, discovered upon premises which might conceivably have been occupied by Toad, could induce in me such caution.

To show my conversion to common sense, I knuckled the marble as in the days of my youthful schooling and made quite a creditable shot—with the glass bulb of a broken thermometer for taw.

I said: "I'll come out and help your Mary play with it, one of these days. I used to be good. . . ."

There seemed little more we could do that day. It was getting late in the afternoon, and Crampton had promised to be home in good time that evening. We agreed that I should let Sir Hector Corrilees know of the empty factory, so that a man could be detailed to watch it, if that was thought necessary.

Crampton said, at parting: "Well, Mr. Murchison, better luck next time. We've six days left for this job. I've thought over what you said about the possibility that your man, Mertz, is Toad. I think it unlikely. As for the chap we scared in the old factory, there's nothing to show who he was. I'll be in tomorrow, and we'll go over the ground a second time, if you like."

We shook hands.

I never saw Crampton again.

I WENT straight to Russell Street, and managed to persuade the commissioner's orderly to take my name to Sir Hector. When I entered his room I saw that Professor Branden was there. The two were talking earnestly.

I related briefly the events of the day, to the place where the occupant of the factory had made his escape. Sir Hector seemed, I thought, a little impatient.

"You should have taken the man on the beat with you. Not that I think the thing has any bearing on Toad. In fact, it seems to me to have been rather a waste of time."

Making full allowance for the burden of his responsibility, I thought this was unjust.

I said: "You haven't heard the whole of the story."

I then went on to relate what followed. When I spoke of the laboratory paraphernalia Branden's haggard face lit interestedly.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed. "That is certainly significant. What do you say, Sir Hector?"

But the chief commissioner's disgruntled mood continued.

"Probably some patent medicine chemist trying to evade the factory

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laws. We'll trace him, if we can. Just as well to make sure. Anything else, Murchison?"

I was rising to take my leave, when I remembered the yellow marble. I felt ashamed to mention such a trivial thing: but I can never be too thankful now that I did.

I said: "Nothing. By the way, there was a sort of yellow marble thing . . . Crampton took it home to give to his little granddaughter."

"What!" Branden exclaimed.

He literally sprang from his chair.

"What did you say? A yellow marble?" His eyes were snapping with excitement. "A yellow marble, Murchison?"

"It looked like one," I replied.

Brandon said: "Good Lord! We must find Crampton at once. At once! Where are your senses, Murchison?"

"Why?" I asked, staring, no doubt, like the fool I was.

Branden threw his hands into the air. He said incredulously: "Were you blind last night? You, too, Sir Hector?"

"I'm darned if I know what you're driving at," Sir Hector said, sharing my astonishment.

The professor appeared to catch at his self-control. He took his hat from the table with trembling hands.

"It was a yellow marble that Toad dropped into the basin of water last night," he said, almost in a whisper.

CHAPTER XV

THE FLAME DESCENDS

THE effect upon Sir Hector and me of Branden's revelation can be guessed. It would appear that Branden, alone, of those who witnessed the demonstration with Satanoil, had identified the object Toad let fall from his hand into the basin. He had supposed that we had all seen it.

"A small yellow marble, Sir Hector; all Hell may be concerned in the marble Crampton has. At all costs we must get hold of it."

In response to Sir Hector's ring, his orderly was already in the room.

"My car, Green. Tell them to be snappy. You'd better come, too Murchison. We may need you. It's the curse of this affair that it has to be kept secret. No: I'll drive myself, Green."

I sat by myself in the back seat, marveling at the spectacle of the chief commissioner of police ignoring almost every rule of the traffic laws which he himself administered. We tore along Flemington Road, over the bridge into Mount Alexander Road, made the railway crossing by a hairline, and thence into Maribyrnong Road.

Astonished constables retained their wits enough apparently to recognize their chief's car, for no halt was called in those furiously driven four miles. In Maribyrnong Road we turned and twisted through side streets until I caught sight of the river somewhere in the vicinity of the Powder Magazine.

I had scarcely identified the locality when Branden suddenly pointed. I saw a curiously-shaped column of smoke lifting itself from a spot to our right. At the same time there came the urgent clanging of a fire engine.

Branden twisted in his seat. I shall never forget the sick horror in his face.

He shouted at me above the roaring of the car's wind: "That's Crampton's house on fire. I'm sure of it. Crampton's house . . ."

Sir Hector, hunched at the wheel, increased our speed. We flashed presently into an open space, with the gleam of the river beyond. Now the seat of

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the conflagration was plain to see. Professor Branden again turned. I could not catch his words, but his lips framed the confirmation of his fear.

"It's Crampton's house all right."

I thought: "What now? What new tragedy is this?"

At the most, I pictured the loss of Crampton's house. It did not occur to me that what we now saw held deeper significance than the misfortune it represented.

There had, I fondly imagined, been an ordinary outbreak of fire. There was nothing especially sinister in this, however sad and serious. I had, as a matter of fact, forgotten the yellow marble—forgotten even Toad, in the excitement of the moment.

But it came to me suddenly that there was something unusual in the appearance of the smoke from the burning building. It clung together in the form of a cone, whose base was flattened upon the house. It remained thus, neither dispelling nor breaking its contour. In the rays of the setting sun it took on a kind of transparency, reminding me somehow of green glass. Across and through this glazed surface there shot long filaments of bright orange flame.

The fire engine was drawn up on the river bank and firemen were running a hose line to the river. Here and there stood an odd spectator, while others hastened to the scene across the open paddocks. In the foreground, as we came to a stop with rasping brakes, a little girl screamed and sobbed in the agitated arms of an elderly woman.

The connection had been made with the hose. Presently a jet of river water hurled itself at the conflagration. I saw the two hosemen brace themselves against the powerful current of it, their hands locked about the nozzle.

AND then . . . How shall I hope to describe what followed? Then, of a sudden, the silver line of darting water turned to a shining green. From the nozzle of the hose rose a spray of mist—steam—I don't know what.

From the hosemen came cries of agony. The hose fell to the ground, where it writhed like a great snake, vomiting not water, but a flame of green fire.

I can still hear Professor Branden's warning shout as he ran gesticulating toward the fire engine.

"Stop that pump. Stop that pump. Cut off the water!"

Sir Hector Corrilees, standing at my side, said hoarsely: "Did you see that? Did you see that, Murchison? The flame ran back along the water . . ."

The fireman at the pump had acted promptly, in response to Branden's terrified entreaty. The green flame ceased to gush from the nozzle. It was withdrawn like a tongue, into the cavern of the burning building.

A medley of excited voices immediately arose, mingled with the groans of the injured hosemen. But on the heels of it came a shrill cry from Branden. He beckoned furiously, calling us by name.

"Corrilees—Murchison—For God's sake!"

I saw; and for an instant my heart seemed to stand still. The ground about the hose, the hose itself, was curling in a green, metallic flame. Wherever water trickled, the green flame followed. In a score of places it moved over the bank toward the river itself.

Sir Hector came to action with a roar.

"Tear that hose out of the river. You men there—turn back those gutters! Keep them from the river, on your lives!"

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The officer in charge, who fortunately knew Sir Hector, repeated the order sharply. I saw men clutch at the hose with scaling-hooks, as I myself raced for a green line just disappearing over the brow of the bank.

Branden bellowed at me: "Don't touch it. Kick up an earthbreak with your heels. . . . burn itself out."

The next few minutes saw a nightmare activity. Twice I stayed a green line by a miracle, even as it poised to fall into the river. Once I narrowly escaped falling headlong into the flame itself.

I came from a stupor of reaction to find Sir Hector before me. He was shaking like a man with chills.

He said: "We did it. We did it. Are you all right, Murchison? It never touched you?"

"No," I answered. "Supposing it had?"

"I don't know," he said, "but the risk was there. Remember Gregory."

I asked: "How about the hosemen?"

"The flame itself never touched them," he replied. "The metal of the nozzle turned white hot all at once. It was that that burned them. The flesh is gone from their hands, seared to the bone."

BRANDEN said shakily: "I've been trying to explain to Mr. Petersen, here, what I think must have happened. Crampton must have stored oil on the premises. Yes, that was it. A chemical oil. I think he once mentioned as much to you, Murchison—remember?"

His look cautioned, implored.

"He said something about it this afternoon," I answered, lying valiantly. "He was a bit of a chemist, in an amateur way. He thought he had found a new spraying oil . . . orchard pests . . ."

An impossible story enough, but I could find nothing better on the spur of the moment.

Peterson said: "Well, it must have been something of the kind. I thought I knew something about fire, but I never in my life saw anything like this. Oil? What kind of oil? I could have sworn that the water itself was in flame. But, of course, that's so darn impossible that—"

He broke off abruptly with a shrug of his shoulders.

"The stuff ran on top of the water," Sir Hector said.

I saw unbelief in Peterson's eyes. But he could find no saner explanation himself.

"Well," he said, "it was the strangest experience. I'd better put that in my report. About the oil, I mean. Anyway, the house is finished. We daren't turn the water on, after a thing like that."

For the first time I turned to look at Crampton's home. It had vanished completely. The ground was swept as bare as the palm of my hand. Not a joist or beam remained. Even the iron of the roof was gone. All that remained was the thin green haze which was characteristic of the aftermath of Satanoil.

I said: "What a dreadful blow for poor Crampton! His wife, too. Where is Crampton, by the way?"

Branden looked at me queerly.

"Murchison, I though you knew. Both Crampton and his wife were in the house. The only one who escaped was their little granddaughter."

I HAVE often wondered what Toad's thoughts were, when read—as no doubt he did—in the papers next day, of the awful fate which befell the Cramptons.

No public mention was made of the yellow marble. Mary Jonas, in the first

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delirium of her terror, had gabbled incessantly of a yellow marble. On this particular she was ignored entirely by both the police and the reporters. Obviously, there could be no connection between such a holocaust and a yellow marble. It was regarded as merely the outcry of a disordered child mind.

And so people were left to guess, if they had interest enough, at the cause of the outbreak. Peterson's report adopted the theory that there had been a chemical oil in bulk on the premises. The point was seized upon by the papers as explaining the unusual incidents which marked the operations of the firemen and the extraordinarily complete burning.

It was agreed that Crampton had somehow ignited the chemical oil, the fumes of which had overcome him and his wife. This was gravely recorded at the coroner's inquest also, following the usual procedure.

The evidence of Mary Jonas was admitted more or less with reservations. The official mind made kindly allowance for her tender years and excited condition. Poor little thing, it thought, it was small wonder that her whispered story was incoherent.

But we who heard that story in full, in circumstances full of gentle sympathy and encouragement, and attuned to the sensitiveness of a frightened and lonely child, arrived at the verdict of truth.

Professor Branden had taken Mary Jonas home to his wife on the night of her grandparents' death. They had no children of their own, and Mrs. Branden welcomed her with open arms.

Not until the child had recovered from the shock of her experiences was any attempt made to probe her allusions to the yellow marble. There came an evening toward the end of our seven days of armistice, when Professor Branden invited Framling and me to his home in the University grounds. On arrival we found Sir Hector Corrilees and Hermann already there. The premier was unable to be present. The facts, had, however, been communicated to him.

Branden and his wife had that morning coaxed Mary to tell her story. Branden made rough notes, and later worked them up. I give them as he read them to us at the time—alternately in the first and third persons, as seemed best for him to record during the light and shade of Mary's account.

She was, then, playing in the garden when Crampton returned home. She ran to meet him: they entered the house together, she clinging to his arm, as her habit was.

Crampton pottered about for a while and then apparently remembered the yellow marble. According to Mary:

"Grandpa said he had a surprise for me. It was a lovely marble thing. We held it up to the light, and it looked as if it was full of smoke inside it. I had fun holding it against the lamp in the kitchen. It was yellow on the outside, but when I looked at it very hard it seemed to be green."

She asked her grandfather where he had obtained the marble. Crampton—making play, I suppose—told her solemnly that it was a fairy marble found under a toadstool by a cross-eyed, left-handed old woman. This play on Toad was probably quite unconscious. He had wanted merely to mystify Mary. And in this he succeeded.

"I asked Grandma if fairies played marbles, but she only smiled. I think Grandpa was teasing me. He said that only boys played marbles, anyhow, so the yellow marble wasn't any use to me. He said to give it back to him.

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"But I didn't, because I thought it was a game we were having. Grandma had gone out of the kitchen, and I ran round the table, holding the marble. I teased Grandpa back. I said that if it was a fairy marble I expected it would vanish suddenly. And then I pretended that it had vanished.

Crampton, it seemed, pursued the child around the kitchen, in an attempt to recover the marble. He was half in jest and half in earnest. She was a nimble little thing, and succeeded in evading him for quite a time.

FINALLY he caught her. Just as he did so, she threw the marble laughingly from her. Crampton spun around to get it, but his sight was not quick enough.

The yellow marble fell—as Mary could have told him—into the big tin pan of water in which her grandmother had been washing the vegetables.

"Grandpa began to hunt for it. He seemed cross. He was right by the pan where the marble was."

And then, just when the child was opening her mouth to tell him, the tragedy happened.

"A big green flame came out of the dish. Oh, it was dreadful. It went all over Grandpa, and he cried out. He went all on fire . . ."

Mrs. Crampton, hearing the cries, came running into the kitchen. After the first shock, she did what most persons so situated would have done. A kerosene tin of water stood at the side of the kitchen sink. She lifted this and threw the contents over her husband.

The frightful result can be imagined.

"All the kitchen became full of green flames. The heat" (Mary was standing by the door) "burned my face and hurt my eyes. Grandma screamed and fell down. I think she fainted."

The terrified child rushed outdoors in a state bordering on frenzy. She had no clear idea of what happened, except that she knew her grandparents were being burned up. She saw an elderly woman passing along the track beyond the gate, and she ran to her, crying.

The woman caught her and tried to soothe her. A boy on a bicycle saw the smoke from the house and rode on and broke a fire alarm.

Mary's story practically ended at this point. Ended in a double sense; for she began to sob and moan in Mrs. Branden's arms, and Branden had abruptly ceased his questioning. He had established the identity of the yellow marble.

CHAPTER XVI

TWO DAYS TO GO

THE Crampton tragedy occurred on Tuesday night. On Wednesday, Professor Branden, Hermann, and I visited the old factory where the yellow marble had been found.

Some one had been before us. The crude laboratory apparatus was gone. The upstairs room was quite empty now, except for odds and ends which were of no use in our investigations. Not only had the various articles been removed, but the bench and sink—in places even parts of the wall—had been thoroughly washed down and cleaned.

Here and there the woodwork was burned with acid, and there were stains on the concrete floor. Otherwise there was no sign of the use to which the place had been put.

Branden asked me to detail the articles I had seen, apart from the glass jars containing the chemicals I have already mentioned. I did so as well as my memory served me. I said that there had been a sort of lamp—what was

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known as a Bunsen burner, I thought. There were retorts and test-tubes, and two or three pipettes. Also a small scale.

"What else?" Branden asked.

"Nothing else," I answered.

He looked disappointed. Indeed, I know he was badly discouraged by the absence of anything from which he might have got a hint as to the nature of Toad's diabolical alchemy.

"I thought there might have been a charcoal oven or a brazier. Well, it can't be helped."

"Wonder why he cleaned up so thoroughly," Hermann said.

Branden snapped impatiently: "I wish the rest were as clear. Of course he cleaned up so that we shouldn't have even a trace on which to base an analysis. Trust his cunning for that. If we had only had the sense to put a man on guard last night, we should know by now a lot more than we do. Crampton's shocking affair drove everything else from our heads."

Nothing was to be gained by staying any longer, and so we returned to town and went our separate ways. Hermann was more worried than I had seen him.

He said, on parting: "In any other circumstances, I would have Toad inside a week. I would put on a dozen men, if need be, to trace him down. But I daren't do it. They would be working in the dark and a false move might bring about the very thing we are fighting to prevent."

Professor Branden said, "Have you thought about the Toad's confederate, Hermann? Or confederates? Can we trace them?"

"Not now," the detective said gloomily, as he turned to swing aboard a street car. "If we landed them now, he would only get others. The thing to do is to get Toad himself."

This view eased my conscience as to Nancy's father. I was a little worried over my suppression of the facts about Rufus Carlisle; yet I thought, after all, I could put my hand on the old man whenever he was wanted.

And there was Nancy to consider. As it was, she was very unhappy: every minute of the day the poor girl expected his identification as the disturber of the Cathedral service. She lived in dread.

AT LUNCH she unburdened herself to this effect. Her father had gone out early in the morning and had not returned, although it was long past his usual hour.

Nancy said: "He was so strange this morning, Maurice. So gentle and vague. And yet, in other respects, more responsible than I remember him for years. Actually he came back twice over to kiss me, when he was going. Almost as if he were really saying goodbye. You don't think his poor mind was contemplating anything foolish, do you?"

Her brown eyes were full of tears, as she looked at me. I hastened to reassure her.

"Of course not," I said. "Very likely he's having a little doze in the gardens. It's such a warm, comfortable day that almost anyone would yield to it."

"Suppose they find out that it was father who made the upset at St. Paul's?"

"They won't," I said.

I left her a little cheered. But toward five o'clock she telephoned me at the Treasury. I knew from her voice that she was crying.

"Maurice, he hasn't come home yet. He's never done this before—never. What can we do?"

I admit I was far from easy myself

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at this news. But as yet I had no theory. I said that I would come at once, and we would talk it over.

George Framling was at my elbow as I talked. The gist of what I said was apparently quite plain; for, as I hung up the receiver, he said: "I don't want to butt in, Maurice, but is anything wrong? It's something to do with old Carlisle, isn't it? You know Mona and I are very fond of Nancy. If we can help you two at any time . . ."

I thanked him sincerely. Already I had come to value the friendship of Framling and his wife. They were warm-hearted and thoroughly dependable. There was, too, our joint interest in this Toadian horror.

"Old Carlisle," I said, "went out as usual this morning, but so far has failed to return. Always before he has been home regularly as twelve o'clock. I mean, since he has given up his eleven o'clock prayer meeting in the siting room. For some weeks now he has gone out fairly early in the morning and returned at noon. The whole of his conduct has altered, in fact."

"This is probably only another phase of it," Framling said. "There's no denying, you know, that the poor chap is mad as they make them.

"By the way, the premier returns to duty tomorrow. I saw him at his home this morning. He's much better, but far from well. The deaths of Crampton and his wife shocked him very greatly. He says he has been out of the ring too long, and it's time to put the gloves on in earnest.

"I can't see what he can do that we haven't done, or are doing. Anyway, we have four days left out of the seven. And who knows but what Hermann may land Toad before the truce runs out."

He said it without conviction.

NANCY was calm again when I found her. She said merely: "I ought not to have worried you. Because, you know, it's quite plain what has happened."

I said, "You think someone has connected him with the Cathedral affair and had him picked up?"

"What else can I think? How can we find out?"

She was not in the mood to be reasoned with. Now that—as she thought—the blow had actually fallen, her timidity had vanished. Her eyes and her voice had grown hard. All her fighting instincts were aroused in defence of her father.

I said: "I'll go out and telephone the police—and the Receiving Home. If that has happened, they're bound to know of it."

I did so. To my relief nothing was known of Rufus Carlisle. No one answering to his description had been encountered. As I was about to leave the telephone booth a new fear came. I rang the hospitals in turn. But here, too, I was speedily reassured. Not illness; not accident.

I spoke just now of a new fear. By this I meant not the death, itself, of Rufus Carlisle, but the possible significance of that death.

In one sense it would have been a happy way out of a very trying position for Nancy. I felt sure that she would very speedily and sensibly adjust herself to his loss.

In another sense, having no relation whatever to Nancy, the old man's death might well prove disastrous to our chances of combating Toad. Of his association, even if indirectly, with Toad, I could no longer doubt. Through him we might ultimately come at the criminal himself. Rufus Carlisle was our sole connecting link; if that link were

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lost our position would become incalculably worse.

I determined now that should the old man be still absent when morning came, I would confide the whole of my suspicions concerning him to George Framling. If Framling thought it advisable, I would speak to Sir Hector Corrilees or Hermann. The time had come when even I might no longer shield the girl I loved from this hurt, in view of the more vital hurt which now threatened a whole community—a whole world.

Nancy gave me a wistful smile on receipt of my news. I knew that the alternative of suicide had occurred to her. In that case, she no doubt told herself it might be days, or even weeks, before her father's body was found.

There was still another possibility of which she fortunately had no conception. Following the old man's outbreak in the Cathedral, Toad had become alarmed. Possibly he feared—as Nancy did—that Rufus Carlisle would be traced and put under restraint. He therefore had coaxed or threatened Carlisle into a place of hiding. The more I thought about this theory, the more surely I approved it.

One effect of Nancy's own theory was to numb her sensibilities, give her resignation and courage. We agreed to avoid the subject for the rest of the evening and await events. If her father had not returned by morning, I was to notify the police, so that search could be undertaken.

We were siting quietly in the front room, when a car drew up at the gate. The shrill accusing tones of Miss Mollie Hollidew reached us faintly. She was, it appeared, berating the unfortunate Cuthbert for some reason or other. Mollie and comedy were never far apart, even in her most dramatic moments, and I saw a faint smile on Nancy's lips.

She said: "Poor Cuthbert."

THE entry of Miss Hollidew into the hall was occasioned with violence. I looked at the clock and saw that it was within a minute of eight. I thought: No wonder she's in a tantrum. She'll be late for the theater. Cuthbert must have overlooked the time.

I expected to hear her flying up the stairs to her room. Instead, she precipitated herself into the sitting room, looked at us with a faint scream, and collapsed upon the sofa.

Nancy, womanlike, was instantly all concern. She went to Mollie and said: "Good heavens! Are you ill, dear?"

Mollie continued to moan.

At this juncture Mr. Weinseidle entered. He wore a hang-dog expression.

I asked: "Is she ill?"

He stammered: "Undoubtedly."

HIS eyes seemed to beckon and I stepped close to him. He muttered hoarsely in my ear: "She got fired at the theater. Talked back to the producer, or something. My gosh! Have I had a rotten time? I ask you. Undoubtedly."

He fell into a chair, and I gave him him a cigarette. His attempt to smoke it was pathetic. Twice it fell on the carpet, and once he put the lighted end in his mouth.

In the meantime, Nancy brought a glass of water.

She said innocently: "Shall I get Cuthbert to ring the theater and tell them you're too ill to attend?"

This brought Miss Hollidew to a sitting position. She flung her fringe from her brow with a tragic hand and laughed scornfully.

"Don't bother. They know perfectly

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well that I'll not be there, tonight or any other night. I may as well tell you that I've resigned. If the firm thinks it owns Mollie Hollidew, it has another guess coming."

"Too bad," Nancy sympathized.

Miss Hollidew stared at her. I thought for a moment that she was going to brazen it out absurdly. But all at once her lip dropped. The ill humor and defiance fled from her, and she cast herself on Nancy's neck with a wail.

"What am I going to do? Oh, what am I going to do?"

I heard a voice—an alien voice, filled with both purpose and appeal—at my back.

"Marry me," it said.

I turned to see Mr. Weinseidle standing with purple face and clenched hands. Somehow all his vacuity had vanished. There was even a certain nobility in the poise of his head, the determination of his look. He was a man transformed.

Mollie Hollidew emitted a sound that was half sob and half a giggle.

She said: "What do you know about that? Marry you!"

"Undoubtedly," said the old Cuthbert. The new Cuthbert added almost ferociously: "Yes, you confounded little fool."

The shock of this rendered Miss Hollidew momentarily speechless.

"My art—"she began.

"Curse your art!" said Cuthbert. "It's time this nonsense stopped. I'm glad they tipped you out of the theater, for there's no excuse now for any more backing and filling."

Miss Hollidew, bolt upright, said faintly: "Cuthbert! Have you been drinking? Why, my goodness, I never even imagined such a thing. I must have time to think about it."

"Tomorrow," Cuthbert said, in his amazing role of cave man, "I'll get a license. Drinking! No I haven't been drinking. But I shall probably get drunk as soon as we're married. Undoubtedly."

As he advanced amorously upon Miss Hollidew, Nancy slipped to my side. By common consent we found ourselves presently in the kitchen, where our laughter exploded simultaneously.

I said: "Something's happened to Cuthbert."

"Astounding," Nancy said. "I'm awfully glad he's taken Mollie in hand at last. I never thought he had it in him. She was so surprised that she nearly fell off the sofa. They'll be perfectly happy together when they are married."

WE STAYED talking for quite a long time. Cuthbert drove away, and we heard Mollie Hollidew going up the stairs to her room.

I said: "It's time you had some rest, too, Nancy. If you like, I'll sit up for an hour or so yet, in case your father comes in."

"No," she said. "It would be no use, Maurice. I seem to know, somehow, that I'll never see him again."

"Why of course you will," I tried to comfort her, but she shook her head.

"It's dear of you to say so, but I know I shall never see him alive again. Yes, I'll promise you I'll try not to worry. It's too late for that, in any case."

I tried to think, as I lay in bed, what ought to be done in the morning. I knew, I was as certain as I could be, that Rufus Carlisle still lived. Toad had made him prisoner . . .

When I opened my eyes on the swirling darkness I seemed to see the flame-colored iris of Toad burning every-

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where. The night was full of the deadly menace of that inhuman stare, and his thin parody of laughter muttered in my ears.

At breakfast, Nancy said: "You see I was right, Maurice. Now what shall we do?"

"We must get the police to search for him," I said. "I'll see to all that. The broadcasting stations can help also. In the meantime, try not to worry."

At the first opportunity, on reaching the premier's office, I drew Framling aside and confided my fear. I thought his face paled a little.

"The only thing to do is to tell the others," he said, after thinking silently for some moments. "If you're right, Maurice, it's hard for Nancy."

"We've got to keep it from her," I said.

Framling shrugged his shoulders and went to the telephone to call Hermann to the Treasury. By luck the detective had not left his office. He promised to come immediately.

"Hermann will know what to do," Framling said.

Presently the detective arrived. Framling smuggled us very unobtrusively into the premier's room. Mr. Hannaford greeted us with a worried smile.

He said: "What is it? If you wish me to send for this man Toad, I will not do it. I refuse absolutely to treat with him. He dare not carry out his threat to destroy the world. I tell you, he dare not . . ."

"It's not that, exactly, sir," Framling explained. "Murchison here has a theory as to Toad's confederate. We thought you ought to be told."

I told briefly what I knew of Rufus Carlisle, making it appear that my suspicions had been aroused only following his disappearance. I did not refer to the Cathedral sensation, but Hermann seized on it instantly.

He said: "It was Carlisle beyond doubt, then, who declaimed the other Sunday during the service at St. Paul's. You remember the incident, sir?"

"I heard of it," the premier said. He looked at me very earnestly. "Was it Carlisle, do you think, Murchison?"

There was no help for it.

"Yes," I answered, "I am afraid it was."

George Framling, with a little apologetic glance at me, said: "Murchison is engaged to Carlisle's daughter, sir."

A KINDLY interest came to Mr. Hannaford's tired face. His sudden smile was singularly sweet and understanding—a true index of the great-hearted man that he was.

"Indeed. I can well believe how distressed both of you must be. Will you tell Miss Carlisle from me that every consideration will be shown her father, should we discover him for her. Of course, she knows nothing of his association with this foul creature?"

"Nothing," I answered. "And, please God, she will never know. Her fear is that her father may be committed to an asylum. I should say, rather, that was her fear. She believes now that the old man is dead. She believes he has killed himself."

"Happier so, perhaps," the premier murmured. He hid his face in his hands for a moment. "Well, Hermann, we must find what fate he has met. We must be patient."

As we rose to go, Hermann said stolidly: "The seven days will be up on Sunday night, sir. Tomorrow is Saturday. If you intend to communicate with Toad in any way, through the newspapers, it will have to be done at once, sir."

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The white of the premier's thin cheek suddenly yielded to an angry red.

"I will not treat with so vile a man. Let him do his worst. I look to you, Hermann, to see that that worst is ineffectual. He must be found and arrested. Is one man to set at nought every rule of civilized conduct? What are you police doing? Are you impotent?"

Before this unexpected outburst Hermann's farmer-like face grew stiff and gray. He said, with hurt dignity: "You forget, Mr. Hannaford, that your own order forbids the aid of the police force as a whole. Now that Crampton is gone, I am practically alone."

"Forgive me," the premier said. He bowed his head once more, and his hand made a gesture infinitely weary and self-accusing. "You are quite right, Hermann, I am—not very well, I think. Do your best. We must all work and hope. And with God be the rest."

To Hermann's everlasting credit there was no bitternes in his voice when he spoke to Framling and me in the corridor.

"I don't wonder the premier's nervous," he said. "It's too great a responsibility to rest on one man's shoulders. But he's right—absolutely right. This isn't a secret to be shared. It would be suicidal to spill it among that tinkering lot of self-seekers he has for a cabinet.

"And just think of the effect on the people themselves. There'd be a revolution before you could wink your eye. No; the premier's a brave and wise man."

. . . Now that Mollie Hollidew was no longer working, Nancy had company at least for a night. When, therefore, George Framling asked me to his flat to talk things over, I had no compunction about going.

Mollie, it transpired, although she had capitulated to the idea of becoming Mrs. Cuthbert Weinseidle, had her own ideas as to when this desirable end should be attained. She had fixed the marriage for the week before Christmas—that is to say, two weeks ahead, for we were now in December. Nancy and I were enlisted as bridesmaid and best man, respectively.

For Nancy's sake, I am glad of the diversion afforded. Despite the uncertainty of her father's fate, she was able to enter into the spirit of the occasion with tolerable enthusiasm.

MONA went early to bed, and Framling and I talked to a late hour. I am bound to say, however, without much comfort. Midway in the evening Framling got his radio going. And curously enough, almost the first item of broadcasting we heard was applicable to our problem.

"The Russell Street police have asked the whereabouts of Rufus Carlisle—C-a-r-l-i-s-l-e—last seen leaving his home at Number 5, Monray Street, East Melbourne, at nine o'clock yesterday morning, please communicate with the nearest police station, or with Miss Carlisle at that address at once."

There followed then a brief description of the old man, which Nancy herself had supplied to Hermann.

"It's a rotten business, altogether," Framling said.

He shivered slightly and pulled hard at his pipe.

He said: "I wish the girls were out of it, Maurice. A man doesn't mind for himself, but when one thinks of women and children . . ."

"Courage," I said.

It was a banal thing to say, and I felt no grudge when he rounded on me almost savagely.

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"How can one have courage after seeing that hellish Satanoil at work? I tell you, Murchison, the premier doesn't realize the half of what threatens. Failing a reply, Toad has promised to give Victoria a lesson. What sort of a lesson? What does he mean to do? Will it be you or will it be me? Or —will it be Mona?"

He was losing grip of himself I could see. He shook like a leaf.

I got up and poured a drink of whisky apiece. I felt that I needed something of the sort for myself.

I said: "It's not as bad as that. It can't be. Do you really think—"

"Gregory . . . Crampton," Framling said. The glass tinkled against his teeth as he drank. "And now who?"

Well, he was badly rattled with his fear for Mona, and so I let it go at that.

Presently, a good deal ashamed, Framling grinned at me sheepishly. "Have another drink, and forget all about it."

We heartily shook hands on a new courage.

George said: "Do you know it's Saturday morning?"

I replied: "The premier is right. Toad would never dare to go too far. He won't dare. We're safe till Monday, anyhow. I don't see what Toad can do. But we'll have to be careful."

"The premier doesn't know it," he said soberly, as he let me into the street, "but there'll be three plainclothes men at his heels from Monday morning onward, until we know what's what."

I looked at the sky. It didn't seem possible that so much beauty was at the mercy of a madman.

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MEN of DARING
by Stookie Allen
F.R. LAW
DEAN OF DAREDEVILS
DAREDEVILS WILL COME AND DAREDEVILS WILL GO, BUT FOR SHEER VERSATILITY FREDERICK RODMAN LAW WILL REMAIN THE MAESTRO OF THEM ALL. AVIATOR, PARACHUTE JUMPER, ACROBAT, HUMAN FLY—SHORTLY AFTER THE TURN OF THE CENTURY HE BEGAN ELECTRIFYING CROWDS WITH A ROUTINE THAT INCLUDED CLIMBING THE FACE OF THE FLATIRON BUILDING, STANDING ON HIS HEAD ATOP THE STATUE OF LIBERTY IN A GALE, SHOOTING A 75-FOOT WATERFALL IN A ROWBOAT, DROPPING ON HORSEBACK 60 FEET INTO THE AUSABLE CHASM RAPIDS.
AS A STUNT EXTRAORDINARY HE JUMPED FROM THE WILLIAMSBURG BRIDGE IN NEW YORK TO THE RESCUE OF A MOVIE ACTRESS; AND
.....STARTED FOR THE STRATOSPHERE IN A MONSTER ROCKET THAT UNFORTUNATELY EXPLODED BEFORE IT HAD RISEN 20 FEET!
HIS PIÈCE DE RÉSISTANCE WAS A TRICK BALLOON ASCENSION. AT 4,000 FEET HE CAUSED THE BAG TO EXPLODE THEN DROPPED TO SAFETY IN A PARACHUTE.
LAW'S ESCAPES FROM DEATH WERE NUMEROUS AND HAIR-RAISING. HE DIED IRONICALLY, IN BED—OF TUBERCULOSIS—AT THE AGE OF 34!

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

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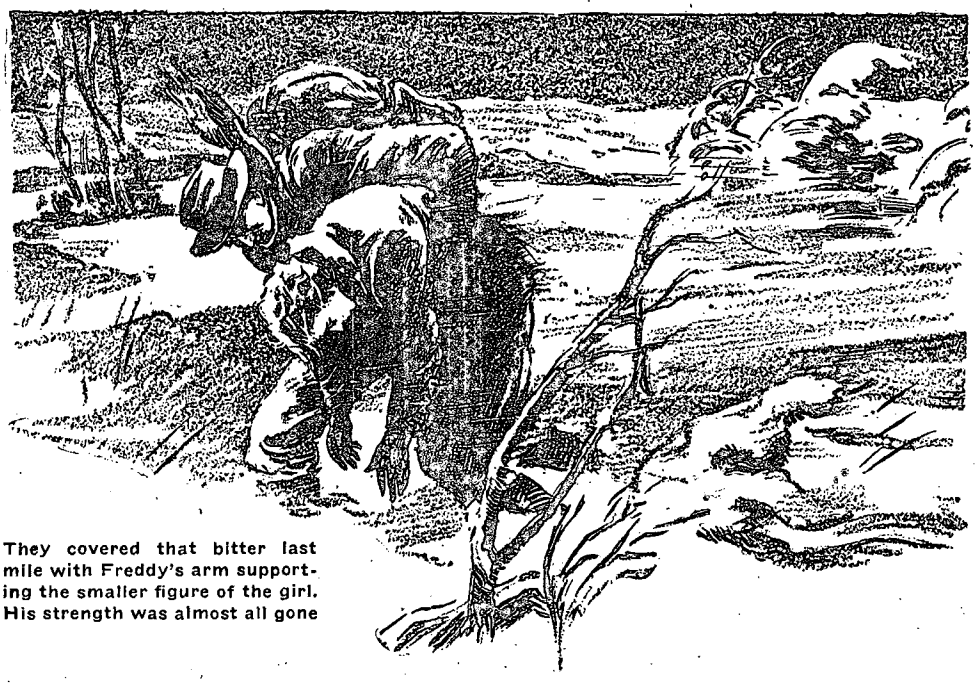
Courage for Two



They covered that bitter last mile with Freddy's arm supporting the smaller figure of the girl. His strength was almost all gone

A very cold path to walk while dying; and a cold, hard path that leads you back to life. And where alien trails cross, it pays to backtrack—but not too far

By ROBERT W. COCHRAN

Author of "Bonus for Brawn," "Hero, Remember," etc.

FREDERICK PACKARD was taking it the hard way. Not satisfied with the verdict from one specialist, he had gone to a second and a third. Then, because he hadn't worked for five months and his money was almost gone, he accepted the inevitable and moved the few things he believed necessary to Point-O-Rocks.

The name was the only attractive thing about the isolated cabin—that and the fact that the owner was willing to rent the place for six months for a hundred dollars.

"May not use it that long," Freddy Packard said, and the owner was apparently too elated over renting the place out of season to see anything odd in the way he said it.

That's when it became obvious that Freddy was taking it the hard way. You couldn't get to Point-O-Rocks, except by plane, for months on end, and Freddy's friends weren't quite up to affording planes to run out ever so often to see if he was still alive.

Among the few possessions he brought with him was a big wall calendar. He hung it right beside his bed, so that after he got too weak to move around he could still reach up and across the dates out.

He didn't bring a gun, not knowing

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much about the use of one. He had seen the possibility that the day might come when he would want to use it on himself. That would have been the easy way. Freddy Packard wasn't having any.

His father had died in the World War, and one of his grandfathers had tried unsuccessfully to treat yellow fever in the Philippines and had stayed too long. It's what came of being a Packard. Freddy didn't make any excuses to himself about it, he went out there to die.

By the time winter snows had blocked the trails with drifts, Freddy Packard realized that dying was becoming an infernal nuisance. There was wood to cut and food to cook, with the added discomfort of melting snow when the spring was frozen.

He lay long hours in his bunk, his eyes fastened on the printed hour-glass above him, rising finally in the bitter cold of midnight to mark with trembling fingers a cross upon the new-born day.

That was the way he played it—the hard way. Another man might well have scored the dates a day, a week ahead, and found oblivion in drugged or liquored sleep; but that to Freddy Packard's mind would have been a breach of trust.

He sat hunched, for endless hours, coughing his life away. He wondered sometimes, his eyes bright with fever, his cheeks red with simulated health, whether nothing could sever the bonds that held him. It was after times like these that he was thankful he had not brought a gun. It would have been so easy, so satisfying, never to have to waken again to a throttling clutch at his throat as he fought for breath.

HE MARKED Christmas Day and New Year's, resenting the petty labors that seemed always to tax his strength beyond endurance.

The fuel he cut either was green and would not burn or else was seasoned so that a constant supply of it must be thrust always into the greedy maw of the sheet-iron stove. He came in time to hate that stove, seeing in its endless demands upon him a need that would track him to the very door of death.

To let it flicker and die out, to sit those last few hours with blankets tucked about his shaking body, to feel that satisfying numbness that precedes the end—that, a voice told him, was the thing to do. That was the sensible, easy way.

But day followed day until a new hazard was added, making a grim triumvirate: sickness, cold, and hunger. Three months at best, he had been told; more likely two or even less; and now, with his supplies all but exhausted, he saw that they had been wrong. Sixty miles by trail through trackless, snow-swept forest to the nearest town.

Sixty miles. It might as well have been six hundred.

He became henceforth niggardly with his food, rationing it out with all the deliberate precision of a miser weighing gold. He set snares in the forest for the small, furry creatures that seemed always there but never quite visible. Once he found a huge white owl roosting by day, and with infinite pains pulled himself upward until he could strike it with a stick.

It was tough and tasteless. Feathers and bones, with meat scarcely worthy of the name. But it was food, and he even boiled the bones a second time and called the tasteless liquor soup.

Three months; but doctors were not always right. A few days, a week, even a month could not be of importance balanced against the acquired wisdom of medical science.

Dying, he thought, is a nuisance; and instead of measuring beans and rice into pans he used for cooking, he began counting each separate grain, each individual seed.

His snares, crude and ineffective things at best, caught nothing. He was gone sometimes for hours in his search for food. Once he chased a rabbit tracking it when it was no longer visible, and left flecks of blood upon the snow at the spot where a spell of coughing stopped him.

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FEBRUARY was almost gone when something very strange happened to disturb the pattern of his living. Instead of waking in the night to cough and feel fingers tightening about his throat, he slept the whole night through. The beginning of the end, he thought, and brought huge quantities of wood into the cabin against the time when he would no longer be able to get outdoors.

That night and the next were sleepless ones. He found it difficult to sleep, knowing that it might bridge an invisible gap. But the third night he slept from sheer exhaustion and awoke to feel refreshed and eager.

He lay long minutes staring at the handmade calendar. Could this be death, this feeling of uplift, this quickened pulse, this fresh desire to live? He pushed the answer from his mind, ignored it, buried it beneath the firm conviction that he had so long accepted. But since it would not be neglected, he then did as he had always done: he flushed it out into the light of day and considered it.

Months, of course, years would pass before he could achieve a complete victory, but he was free of the shadow of death.

That day he took stock again of his supplies. A week, ten days at the most was all that he could hope for from the meager amount of flour, meal, and rice. Ten days; yet if he started immediately he could reach Stubenville in ten days, in less time if he was lucky.

That was all that he needed: luck, a fair amount of it. And for three days after he left the cabin he thought he had it.

Then when he stirred in his blankets the morning of the fourth day, a tiny avalanche of snow cascaded from the blanket's edge into his half-covered face, and he knew that his streak of luck hadn't held.

The charred embers of his night's fire were already covered. He sat up and shook the snow from the blankets. It wasn't so cold, not nearly so cold as it had been in midwinter in the cabin, but with the sun obliterated he was like a landsman at sea. He knew if he went west he would strike a highway, yet already he was not certain which direction was west.

He rebuilt his fire and made a sorry breakfast of baked mush and water that had hardly a trace of tea in it. He was undoubtedly more than halfway to the settlement, for he had reckoned his progress at close to ten miles a day.

His first impulse, when he had eaten, was to strike with all haste out in what he believed to be the direction of the highway and the town; but he didn't give way to it. He sat, instead, wrapped in his blankets, feeding with careful deliberation fuel to the sputtering flames.

Noontime came. He knew it was noon by the gnawing emptiness of his stomach, and he arose and gathered a fresh supply of fuel, seeing without surprise or alarm that the tracks he had made in the early morning were no longer visible. Carefully, he tended the fire during that night and awoke at dawn to a clear sky and a cold north wind.

He ate that morning the last of his meal baked in the hot ashes of his fire, and refrained from using the final pinch of tea in the sack that held it.

Twenty miles at the most, he reasoned, separated him from Stubenville. If he didn't get there tonight, he could make it easily by the following evening. The sun came up bright, and he bore a little to the west, thinking that if he struck the state road he might find some rancher or farmer driving into town.

WHEN he first saw footsteps he stopped dead still in his tracks and stared at them. They crossed on a tangent the imaginary line that he was following to the state road. The snow was hard packed, so that they must have been made after the storm had passed.

He stood, considering the new possibilities that had opened in finding that another person was traveling that wilderness. He could continue as before, hoping

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to reach the road, or failing that eventually Stubenville; or he could back track the other's trail, assuming that it would be a more direct way either to the town or to a place where he could secure food and shelter.

The third possibility was the least prepossessing: he could follow the other's footsteps, hoping either to overtake him or to be led eventually to the other's destination. The tracks pointed into the northeast where his own cabin lay, and he knew of no shelter within miles; so he continued finally upon the imaginary line that would lead him to the state road and Stubenville.

He didn't bother to stop and make a fire at noon. If he was forced to spend another night in the open, the little spot of tea he had left would be more than welcome in place of food.

He covered two miles, in alternate periods of walking and resting, before he came again upon the same sized prints. This time they were pointing almost due north.

They were short steps, but they did not drag the snow from print to print as his own did, so it was obvious that their owner was not trail-weary. He followed them for a half a mile, and in that short distance they had twice shifted their direction. Because it was in the general direction of Stubenville, he continued to follow the other's tracks at intervals, losing them sometimes for a hundred yards, then coming suddenly upon them again.

The man, he thought, is either drunk or lost. To turn back himself now would place Stubenville forever beyond him.

He walked another hundred yards, examining closely the tracks before his eyes. A half-burned cigarette lay all but concealed, as the owner had discarded it and then from force of habit stepped upon the live butt. Stooping, he salvaged the wet wisp of tobacco in its thin wrappings of moist paper and examined it. Then, quite deliberately, he did an about-face and turned back in the direction from which he had come.

His decision to turn back was almost instinctive. Ahead lay shelter, food, life. In turning back it was almost as if he were returning to the death he had so narrowly escaped.

At nightfall, when he stopped to light a fire, he measured with his eyes the small pinch of hoarded tea and put it away almost savagely. He fed the blaze, hoping —though he knew it to be a vain hope— that it would attract the attention of this one whose trail he followed.

The second day was even worse than the first, for the tracks in the snow pointed never for long in the same direction. In midmorning he came to the blackened embers of the other's fire and saw that there was no sign of food having been cooked over it.

For a little while, then, the steps headed northeast again, but as the morning advanced to noon they resumed their futile wandering, first this way, then that.

He found once a place where a body had flung itself upon the snow as if refusing to go farther, but either from cold or resolve had got up and gone ahead.

He walked with his eyes upon the trail, so that he was almost upon the still figure in the snow before he saw it. There was no movement, and he came nearer and bent down, half afraid that he was too late to avert tragedy. The figure turned and they stared at each other without speaking for a moment.

"You're not hurt, are you?" Freddy Packard asked. "Just tired?"

"Just tired."

HE PUT his blanket down on the snow and helped her to her feet and watched her slump down upon it. "I'll get a fire going," he said, and cleared a place partially with his foot. When he came back with some dead branches she had raked more of the snow away.

"I'm lost," she said, and when he didn't answer, "Do you live around here? How did you happen to find me?"

He struck a match and held it to a little mound of whittlings he had made,

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and when it caught he turned. "I was on my way to Stubenville. I saw your tracks; that was yesterday."

"Oh," she said, seeming to read increased disaster in his statement. "Then you haven't got a place near. You see I'm hungry." She smiled at him as if making excuses to herself because he overlooked that she might be hungry.

"I'll make some tea in a minute," he said. "My name's Packard, Fred Packard. Do you want to tell me how you happened to be out here alone?"

He wondered why she hesitated so long before she answered. At last she said, "I was driving from Shelby to Stubenville. There was a storm and the car ran out of gas. I thought I could find a house somewhere along the road. Then I lost the road, and . . . Well, I've been walking ever since."

He had his little pan of snow on the fire melting, and when it boiled he poured in the small pinch of tea he had left. "If I had a gun," he said, "I might be able to get a deer. Even a rabbit would help."

"You don't have a gun?"

"When this cools you can drink it slowly. No, I don't have a gun. Will anyone be looking for you? Do you think they'll find your car?"

She caught his eye and nodded without answering; then her gaze shifted to the little pan of tea cooling on the snow.

He followed her eyes and said, "We'll have to start back. If we should have another storm, we'd be in a mess."

"You didn't tell me," she reminded him, "where you came from."

"I've been holed up in a cabin east of here since fall, but if you're thinking we might get shelter there, forget it. There's no food and I haven't any idea which direction it would be from here."

She sipped the tea and extended the pan to him. "Next," she said, and tried to smile.

He shook his head. "Drink it all; I stopped at noon and filled up." When she had finished he held the pan with the tea leaves over the fire until most of the water had been steamed from them, then folded them back into the bag that had originally held them.

"We'd better start," he said, and got up from where he had been squatting on his heels.

She made no protest and rose first to her knees, then to her feet. "My name's Linton," she said, "Agnes Linton."

He folded the blankets and strapped them to his shoulder. "South and west," he said, "unless you're afraid to take a shot in the dark like that."

"You're taking a big risk on my account," she said, and he felt again that sense of hidden meaning.

"I saw the lipstick on the cigarette back there. What I did after that was what any man would have done."

"Not any man," she said quickly.

There was no moon, no stars, but they blundered on long after the last sign of daylight had faded from the sky.

WHEN he stopped finally, they had covered the last mile with his arm supporting the smaller figure of the girl. He spread again his blankets for her while he gathered fuel for the night.

"I'm not used to being waited on," she said, and broke the smaller branches that he brought until she had a little mound of them in a place she had cleared in the snow. "Now I know," she said as he rested beside her, "why you saved those tea leaves this afternoon. That's all we have. That's . . ."

She caught his arm almost angrily. "You lied. How long since you've had anything to eat?"

"Yesterday," he said, and heaped larger branches on the fire. He fastened a stick to the short handle of the pan and filling it with snow gave it to her. "Keep adding more until it's full. We'll need a lot of wood."

They shared the weak brew that he called tea and sat staring into the flames when this was gone.

"You could have been in Stubenville by now," she pointed out.

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"We'll be there tomorrow," Freddy Packard said.

They agreed to take turns that night watching the fire, waking each other when the urge to sleep became overpowering. "Now don't be a fool," the girl said, "and wake me up when it's my time."

But he was a fool. He caught little snatches of sleep, but only for a few minutes at a time, and the girl slept soundly until almost morning.

"Why do you make it so hard for yourself?" she asked when it began to grow light.

He smiled, wondering whether he dared tell her how hard he had made it for himself the past months. She wouldn't be interested, he decided, and stared drowsily into the fire until it was light enough to move forward.

South and west, he kept reminding himself, but the girl lagged that day and he was too weak to carry her. "Go on," she urged him, "there's no use of your trying to be a hero for me."

It would have been the easy thing to do, but he couldn't see it that way. He laughed sometimes half hysterically as he thought of the terrible business he was making of dying.

That night they both slept and the fire burned itself out and they awoke cold and unrefreshed. He built a fresh fire and sat tending it until daylight. It was, he decided, to be the last day. If they didn't reach some shelter and food by nightfall they wouldn't reach it at all.

The girl didn't want to leave the fire when daylight finally came. "I lied to you, back there," she said. "My name isn't Agnes Linton; it's Sadie Morgan. Does that mean anything to you?"

"No," Freddy Packard said, "it doesn't. Should it?"

She laughed, a weak, bitter laugh, before she answered. "It could mean five thousand dollars. If you get me to Stubenville you can get that much for me."

"Well," Freddy Packard said, "you must be a pretty important woman."

"Listen, Freddy, come down to earth. Sadie Morgan isn't important, she's dangerous. Do you see the difference? Look."

She pulled a small, blunt gun from the pocket of her coat and showed it to him. "You go on, you're too nice a guy to be mixed up in the death of Sadie Morgan. They'll find me sometime."

"Tell me about it."

"There's nothing to tell. I thought I could get over the mountains ahead of the storm. If I made it I was good for a getaway. I didn't make it."

"What'll it mean if you get caught?"

"Ten years, maybe more, but I'm not going to get caught. Not alive, anyway."

"It's light enough," Freddy Packard said. "Maybe I'd better take the gun."

"No." she said huskily. "Just being seen with me would ruin you."

"Give me the gun," he repeated.

He stuffed it into his pocket when she released it and helped her to her feet.

IT WAS dark that night when he saw the light across the snow. He pointed it out to her. "That's Stubenville. Another thirty minutes—"

"Another thirty minutes and I'll be in jail."

That was the easy way: take Sadie Morgan to the sheriff and collect five thousand dollars. But he had never done things the easy way; he knew that it was too late to start now. He said, "You're my wife, see. The name's Packard, in case you've forgotten. We'll get a place to stay; you can keep out of sight. Two or three days we'll get you out of here."

"Freddy," Sadie Morgan said, "I'm not worth it. I drove the car for Joe Morgan's gang for two years. Joe was my brother. Don't you see, I'm not worth it."

They found a place that took two dollars of Freddy Packard's money and asked no questions. He slept on blankets on the floor that night, drugged from too much food and too much comfort. When he awoke at dawn the bed in the corner of the room was empty.

He sat on his blankets for a long time and stared at that empty bed. It solved a

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problem for him, a problem that had been uppermost in his mind as he had fallen asleep.

He saw the note on the bed when he got to his feet, and laughed a little.

Freddy:

I'm leaving you a grand, for saving my life. You did that you know. Don't worry about me. I checked this town before I headed out here. I can get a train out at three in the morning. Best luck, Pal.

Sadie

He tore the note in little pieces and then held the thin sheaf of bills in his hand, comparing it with the fifty dollars that was left of his own money. It meant comfort and food and clothes until he could get a job. The easy way was to slip it in his pocket, but he didn't.

He went down through the lobby of the cheap hotel and dropped the bills into the open door of the wood stove.

He was waiting for an eastbound train the next day when he saw the newspaper on the bench in the station. Sadie's face stared up at him, and quickly he read the printed words.

The police are still searching for a thousand dollars in marked bills that was missing from the ransom money in Sadie Morgan's possession. When this is found, the entire fifty thousand will have been recovered. Except for this last detail, the notorious Morgan gang has been satisfactorily accounted for, either by bullets or iron bars.

Freddy Packard's hands trembled as he thought of what might have happened had he come to buy his ticket with that money the girl had left. Aiding and abetting a criminal, they would call it. A year, even a few months in a sunless prison would start again those clutching fingers.

He was going back East all right, but he would go the hard way. From the west came the rumble of a moving freight.

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The White Oomailik

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

CHAPTER XXVI

DEATH OF A SHIP

AS THE ship backed away for another charge, the men began turning the huge wheels that operated the hand pumps. A jerky stream of water spilled across the deck and disappeared in the scuppers.

Ice spumed from under the bows as she struck again. The *Mary Ridley* slowed almost to a stop, then her propeller sent her through into open water. Men from the *Polar Night,* seeing rescue, were coming down the lead with a line. They sent it aboard as the whaler put about, and a few minutes later the steam winch hauled a heavy hawser to the bitts.

Bill Ridley lit his pipe and loafed against the rail, obviously enjoying Tim's difficulty. He had an idea the situation was made to order for his father. If the *Mary Ridley* was lost, the elder Ridley would present a staggering claim to the Government. "Banning is sweating blood," Bill told himself with satisfaction.

But Banning was also hauling the *Polar Night* from her icy trap. He broke through the barrier again, eyed the main floe moving down on them, and then towed the *Polar Night* into the open lead. As the barrier closed behind the schooner's damaged stern, the carpenter appeared.

"This ship's makin' water faster'n the pumps can handle it," he said. "I've been tearin' the skin out of her tryin' to locate the leak, but haven't found a thing. The open seam is lower down, along the bottom, sir."

"I'll beach her," Tim said. "Beach her and trust to luck the pack will miss her." It was better than letting her founder.

The first installment of this six-part serial, herein concluded, appeared in the Argosy for February 3

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"And then what?" Bill Ridley inquired coldly.

"I'm taking the *Polar Night* and continuing my work," Tim retorted.

"It looks to me as if the Arctic will be pretty well littered with Ridley whalers when you get through," Bill observed. Tim selected a spot with a sandy bottom and drove the *Mary Ridley* ashore at full speed. Responding to a distress signal, the *Polar Night* approached. Tim and a picked crew of Banning whalers quit the stranded vessel and boarded the schooner.

"Sorry, Captain," Tim said, "but I'm taking over your command."

"Very well, Lieutenant," the master answered, "and may luck go with you. So far this has been a great day for Scalzo."

"Scalzo! What do you mean?" Tim sharply demanded. "Where is he?"

"Dead likely," the skipper answered, "as he hasn't been seen in months. But when he was fired by the Ridley interests he said he hoped to see the day when the Bannings and Ridleys fought each other to a finish. Then he planned to line up an organization that would take over the whaling and trading of the entire Arctic.

"The ice is making his dream come true—the *Audacious* on her way into the Arctic Basin again, the *Mary Ridley* beached and certain to be crushed within twenty-four hours, and my *Polar Night* with a damaged screw and no rudder."

"You can stay aboard if you wish, Captain," Tim offered.

"No, I'll join Bill," the master answered. "It's too bad you two outfits can't get along. I've had a different attitude toward the Bannings since you've run things up here. You weren't afraid to amputate my man's arm; you got the reindeer through, and you fought Bill man to man instead of hiding behind your uniform. You've won the respect of many a Ridley whaling man. It's too bad you haven't the trust of Bill and Mary."

"Thanks," Tim answered, heartened by this unexpected tribute from an enemy master.

"Take over my schooner if you need her but save her if you can." A pathetic note crept into the man's voice. "She means a lot to me—I helped build her."

They shook hands and the master went over the side. Tim put a crew to work completing the jury rudder which the *Polar Night's* men had started rigging. The vessel limped along at half speed terribly shaken by the vibration from her damaged propeller.

SMOKE signals were coming up from the Ridleys' *Ranger* and Sulphur-bottom Banning's *Pearl, Bangor* and *Elsie*. Tim headed for the *Ranger*. She was nearest and had lost her propeller.

The master had blasted out a channel and was trying to kedge his craft to safety with the odds all against him. "Give me a line," he bellowed, "and tow me to open water and I'll sail out of this blasted hell-hole. I've sailed out of worse positions than this, but no ice was moving down on me."

The *Polar Night* slugged her way through the ice to open water, aided during the last hour by the *Ranger's* sails. "Have you any cargo aboard?" the *Ranger's* master demanded.

"It was all sent to the beach last winter," Tim answered. "The *Polar Night* wasn't expected to make it through. She's leaking badly." He bellowed the *Mary Ridley's* position. "Put in there if you can do it with safety.

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They may need help. They've lost the *Endeavor* already."

Tim limped on at full engine speed, while the engineer almost shed tears because of the damage the vibration was causing his engine. Tim got up sail to aid the engine and stood in toward the cove which had thus far sheltered Sulphur-bottom's craft. Ice was piling up along the shore and the din was tremendous as blocks as large as houses tumbled about like scattered grain.

"Down home it's Fourth of July, too," a man observed. "They're havin' a parade of the Horribles about now, men are shootin' powder under anvils and children are gettin' powder burns and blowin' their fingers off. And they'll have picnic lunches . . ."

"You'd better not think of the lunches," Tim advised. He could see the Horribles, though—men dressed in their worst clothing, made up to look hideous. "We're missing the Fourth of July oration, anyway. That's a blessing."

He climbed to the crow's nest and scanned the floes. The ice was on its way to finish the three whalers that had escaped the fall crush. There was no doubt of it. It looked as if the wind and current had figured it all out and were throwing the floes at the angle calculated to get the swiftest results.

There was something of old Sulphur-bottom Banning's oak-hearted smugness about these craft. They seemed to be saying, "We're solidly built. Lean on us; we won't let you down."

Tim drove the *Polar Night* straight toward the breach they had blasted in the ice. Rod by rod he smashed through the last hundred yards, and sent a line aboard the nearest ship, the *Pearl*. The latter sent a line to the *Bangor*.

It looked like a big job: much too big for the boat he had to work with.

"I'll try towing two of you," Tim bellowed, "but the ship's engines are going to pieces."

"Get me beyond the point," the *Pearl's* skipper shouted back, "and I'll sail out."

THREE hours elapsed before Tim dragged the two whalers to safety. He looked through his glasses at the *Elsie*. The main floe was running strong toward her.

"She's doomed," the *Polar Night's* carpenter remarked. He was an old Arctic man and his comment confirmed Tim's own opinion.

By every law of retribution old Sulphur-bottom deserved to lose that craft, and yet . . .

Tim went in and lost his jury rudder as he turned about. The *Elsie* was so close they heaved a line aboard. "We'll lash 'em together," Tim yelled. "I'll supply the power, you do the steering for both of us. Lively, if you want to get out of here."

The skipper nodded, yet he would have bet a lifetime's reputation as an Arctic whaler that the two would go down. He put several men aboard the *Polar Night* to help man the pumps. The vibrating propeller was finishing the damage the ice had started.

The two ships twisted and turned, moving sluggishly, grinding through as the pack carried them along. The blue patch of water that spelled safety was sometimes near, and again far, as mush ice drifted over it, or the pressure sent forth icy peninsulas.

The wind caught the *Elsie's* sails and she began moving ahead, dragging the *Polar Night* with her. "If I cut loose she'll get through before the lead

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closes up," Tim said. "Just old Sulphur-bottom's luck. I save all three of his ships and lose my own. For the good of his soul he should lose the *Elsie.*"

In dealing with Ridley craft he hadn't found it difficult to remember he was a Revenue Cutter lieuenant. He had been impartial or so he believed.

But now the memory of old Sulphur-bottom's harshness was large in his mind. For years the man had been downright unjust. There had never been praise—not that Tim had needed or desired it in recent years. But in his boyhood there had been moments when a word of approval would have helped. Tim called himself a dirty traitor, but he kept on hoping the *Elsie* wouldn't escape.

And that hope did not make him proud of himself.

"I'm all that the Ridleys believe I am," he snarled at himself. "In the shadow I'm a Banning, not a government man."

But in that respect Tim's judgment of himself was wrong. Before everything else he was a sailor. Even when bitterness filled him, he ordered the lines cut. The *Elsie* moved steadily ahead, grinding through the ice, paying out a line secured to the *Polar Night's* bow. When she was in the clear, the line tightened and the *Polar Night* yawed back and forth while her engine pounded.

Astern they were hard at work on another jury rudder. Ahead the ice crossed the *Polar Night's* bows. The towline dipped and snapped upward, dripping with icy water. It dipped again and then the ice came on, cutting the line.

The floe closed in on the *Elsie* and she heaved upward as the ice got underneath. A topmast carried away and the wreckage tumbled to the deck. Tim saw them carry a limp figure aft; then the floe broke up and the schooner moved on.

The engine suddenly raced as the ice sheared off the remaining blades of the *Polar Night's* propeller. The engineer shut off the steam hurriedly and asked for orders.

"Pull your fires," Tim answered, "and send your people on deck with their gear."

He stood and watched.

There was something majestic in the floe's attack, but it was terrifying, too. The sails struggled valiantly to carry on where steam and steel had failed. The *Polar Night* crunched and growled as she fought off the icy fangs; then a moving pressure ridge struck the bow and tons of ice covered the deck. The ship went down by the head and the pack applied its terrible force to the beam ends. Timbers snapped deep within the ship.

"She won't lift up," Tim roared. "She's going down."

All along the side men heaved their belongings to the ice. Two umiaks slithered to safety and men carried them well back, fearing the mass of ice might overturn.

Tim jumped ashore seconds behind the last sailor. They caught up the food and clothing littering the ice and carried it to the umiaks. A pressure ridge rose, dripping, and toppled aboard the *Polar Night,* snapping the main-mast off level with the deck. The mast broke up as it crashed onto the ice.

"There she goes!" a sailor shouted, and his voice was awed.

"We didn't have time to pull all fires," the engineer cried, "the boilers—"

The *Polar Night's* stern lifted, revealing the bright, clean metal where

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the blades had sheared off, and as suddenly it settled. Ice spumed up, and bits of shattered wood; then the enormous weight of the pressure ridge turning over forced the ship down.

The floe shook as the boilers let go. Wreckage shot upward in a geyser of ice and water, and tumbled back. The ice closed quickly over the spot, sealing the grave of the ship, and the floe moved on.

"She was a stout ship," a Ridley whaler said, "New England shipbuilders put their best work into her. The skipper will take this hard."

"She had as fine engines as ever went into a whaler," the engineer muttered. The men moved slowly over the pack.

CHAPTER XXVII

DANCE, SALVAGE MEN

THE *Elsie* stood by and took Tim and the others aboard. "You'll catch hell from the Ridleys, the skipper said, half grinning as he shook his head. "But you batted a hundred per cent for Sulphur-bottom. What's left to be done?"

"Keep clear of the pack until the *Aurora* gets around Point Barrow," Tim answered. "She'll fight her way through, stock the various ships with needed supplies and lead the way out."

"Are you going with her?"

"It depends on orders," Tim answered. "If I have my way, I'll ask for detached duty and put in my time running down every man who in any way attempted to block the Overland Expedition. And particularly I want to look into Scalzo's activites."

"Scalzo hasn't been seen," the skipper answered. "And when a man hasn't been seen in the Arctic he's either quit the country or is dead."

"The *Polar Night's* master said practically the same thing," Tim said. "Nevertheless, there's plenty to be cleared up, including the murder of two herders. If Scalzo is guilty, and dead, then that ends it."

"And you're not forgetting Bill Ridley's parka, with the ermine hood?" the skipper ventured.

"Not for a minute," Tim promptly answered.

The *Elsie,* trailing her sister ships, moved slowly to the open water. Tim glanced at his watch. The glorious Fourth was nearly over. For better than thirty hours they had fought the ice.

Tim leaned against the rail and lighted his pipe. He started to relax, but this period of excitement and surprises was not yet ended.

The lookout at the masthead called down: "Maybe I'm seeing a ghost ship, sir, but if the *Mary Ridley* ain't moving off the shore ice, then it's her sister."

Tim sprang into the rigging and ran to the crow's nest. The lookout handed over his glasses and Tim fixed them on a vessel with masts and stacks visible beyond a pressure ridge. This ridge, part of the main pack, was a good seven miles distant.

And the lookout was right.

There was no doubt about it—the *Mary Ridley* was free. Staring through the glasses, Tim puzzled over this. Had Bill Ridley partially flooded his own vessel after Tim had boarded her in order to force Tim to strand the ship? Bill must have known that Tim would strand her at a point where damage to the hull would be negligible. If her hull was tight, it would be an easy matter for Bill to pump her clear. Thus lightened, setting her free would not be difficult. A neat way of getting the

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Mary Ridley out of Tim Banning's hands.

"And that leaves him in a position to salvage the *Audacious,*" Tim exclaimed. "Damn it, that trick never occurred to me. Bill's no fool. He must have known the chances were ten to one the ice would smash the *Mary Ridley* before he could pump her out and get her into open water. But he took that chance and won."

As he watched, the whaler moved to the right, cleared the high point of the ridge, and Tim had a view of her deck. At this distance he could detect no damage. Smoke poured from her stack in black clouds, proving that Bill Ridley was driving her at full speed. A floe nearly seven miles wide and Heaven only knew how long separated the *Elsie* from the *Mary Ridley.*

Tim studied the great floe intently. "What're you looking for, sir?" the lookout inquired.

"The thing the *Mary Ridley* wants above everything else," Tim replied, "the *Audacious.*"

The lookout whistled. "So that's why she's riskin' a crushin' in the ice, eh?" he said.

HOURS later the floe narrowed and they got within a mile of the *Mary Ridley.* Bill Ridley was in command, and Mary paced the poop with him. Tim couldn't help admiring them for the chances they were taking with the ice, even though he understood what they planned.

They did have courage.

The *Elsie* changed her course and tacked away from the floe. When she returned, Tim sighted the *Audacious.* The whaler was on an even keel, thanks to Jenner's blasting, but she was still a prisoner. Smoke trailed from her funnel, but she couldn't turn her propeller. The first revolution would shear off the blades.

"Set me on the pack," Tim ordered. "I think I can reach that ship before the *Mary Ridley* does."

"You're in command," the *Elsie's* skipper answered, "and I have no choice in the matter, but I think you're crazy to try it."

He set Tim on the ice, then stood off a quarter mile, hove to, ready to send a rescue party. Tim felt like an insect on a wall. He crawled over pressure ridges and skirted cracks through which the sea water sucked and squirted.

Hours passed, but he seemed to get no nearer. Above the grind of the pack he heard successive explosions as the *Mary Ridley's* men blew out a channel. Men moved on the dead run as they obeyed Bill's commands.

Deeper and deeper the big whaler pushed into the treacherous floe. Bill Ridley was gambling his own ship in the hope of salvaging his rival's finest whaler.

A tremendous explosion sent the ice high in the air. The *Mary Ridley* drove through to within a hundred yards of the *Audacious.* Her crew went over the side and fairly swarmed over the imprisoned craft.

Tim saw Jenner and his two companions hustled to the ice then driven well onto the floe. Steam plumed from deck winches and a line was hauled from the *Audacious* to the rescuing vessel.

Tim stopped dead in his tracks, as his ship moved under the strain. Slowly at first, then with gathering speed, the *Audacious* was drawn clear. Bill Ridley charged about in triumph; he grabbed his sister and went into a two-step. They were too far away for Tim to hear anything that was said, but he

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could guess the tone of it easily enough.

Jenner, weary and dejected, joined Tim. "I'll have to admit they deserved to salvage her," he said. "They took long odds on being trapped, and they're not in the clear yet. Sorry, sir, but we failed."

"You did your best," Tim assured him.

"It wasn't that," Jenner explained. "We boarded her and found the skipper dead, just as you said. We buried him in a lead, then we got the vessel on an even keel. Meantime one of the boys was gettin' up steam. It wasn't until we tried to turn the engines over that we knew we were licked, sir. They'd been damaged."

"Damaged?" Tim asked.

"Yes, and the damage was recent, and hurried. Somebody got aboard her one of those times when the floes brought her close to the shore."

"Any idea who it was?" Tim asked.

"Well the damage kept us from saving her and gave Bill Ridley his chance," Jenner answered. "She had to be towed and he was there to do it.

"And it's damned queer, if you stop to think of it, that the *Mary Ridley* sprang a leak and the leak stopped as soon as you were out of sight. That outfit is so crooked they can't lie straight in bed."

"Come on," Tim said. "We've got to get back to the *Elsie*. The Ridleys aren't inviting us to stay with them."

CHAPTER XXVIII

AHOY, UNCLE SAM!

IN THE days that followed the *Elsie* kept clear of the pack and frequently sailed over the horizon. But when she returned the same scene greeted Tim Banning's eyes—the *Mary Ridley*, with the *Audacious* in tow was striving desperately to find an opening that would permit her to escape the trap between floe and shore.

The *Elsie* stood in one day and the lookout sighted two men coming over the ice. "They're signaling, sir," he reported.

Tim went into the boat the skipper sent to the floe. As it neared the pair, he recognized them as Banning men who had been left aboard the *Mary Ridley*.

"We know what happened to the *Mary Ridley*, sir," one of them reported to Tim. "She didn't spring a leak. Her seacocks was opened. It was an attempt to scuttle the ship in deep water, but the cocks jammed and the full amount of water couldn't get in.

"Bill Ridley discovered it, sent a man down to close 'em, then pump her out. He thinks you done it. There'll be hell to pay when the Aurora gets here."

"Ridley's crazy!" Tim exclaimed. "Why should I scuttle the only ship large enough to haul out the *Audacious*. I'm going to board that packet and have a showdown with Ridley."

"He on the *Audacious*, sir. The girl stayed on the *Mary*."

Aided by Jenner, Tim dragged a small umiak over the ice and launched it, and again the *Elsie* stood by until assured they were safe.

Tim came alongside the *Audacious* and climbed the ladder. As he dropped lightly to the deck, Bill Ridley came forward to meet him.

"Good morning, Lieutenant," he said pleasantly. "You saw, of course, that we salvaged this vessel?"

"I did," Tim admitted.

"Then will you sign a document to that effect?" Bill asked.

"Steamer ahoy!" The lookout bellowed excitedly. He didn't wait for a response from deck, but yelled, "It's

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the *Aurora!* And she's driving through the ice like all hell was after her."

"Will you sign?" Bill repeated.

"Certainly," Tim answered. "And may I have your permission to put certain papers in the captain's safe? I have the combination."

He noticed various members of the crew were pretendng to look for the *Aurora,* but actually were listening to the conversation. "This," he continued drawing a sealed envelope from his pocket, "contains a report of a native identifying the man who killed my herders. The man who made this statement has since died.

"The envelope is to be opened only in the presence of the *Aurora's* captain."

"Thanks for your confidence, Lieutenant," Bill said in a hard voice. "There was a time, you know, when you were sure I shot your herders."

"I was certain I had put a bullet through an ermine parka hood," Tim observed. "As you wore the only parka with such a hood why—" He bowed mockingly and made his way to the captain's cabin.

"I'll not follow, Lieutenant," Bill said. "I'm afraid I might learn the combination, and that knowledge might be dangerous to have. When murder is involved, you can't be too careful."

ALONE, Tim opened the safe and deposited the envelope in it; then he joined Bill Ridley on deck. The smudge of smoke, moving back and forth along the horizon, was appreciably nearer.

Excitement gripped the men lining the rail. But presently those who had the watch below began going forward to their quarters. It might be forty-eight hours before the *Aurora* broke through the final barrier. Then there would be fresh supplies, news from the outside world and mail.

"I'm turning in," Tim said, entering the mate's quarters.

Bill Ridley yawned. "A good idea," he agreed, pausing at the room the second mate occupied. They both avoided the master's quarters, Tim for reasons of his own, and Bill Ridley because, as he explained, he had no intention of being left alone with the safe.

"I'd feel better if you'd lock the door and keep the key," he said.

"Certainly," Tim replied. He opened a port in the master's room, closed and locked the door, then retired, leaving a port open in his own room. He lit a candle, placed it on a shelf, and stretched out in the bunk. Lying there, he kept his eyes on the open woodwork which admitted air from the room where master and mates dined and relaxed.

Several hours passed without incident. Then a sudden air current almost extinguished the candle. Tim exclaimed softly. He had been waiting for that signal. It meant that someone had opened the master's door, letting a draft blow through the mate's port, through the open woodwork and out the master's port.

He quietly left the bunk and peered through the keyhole. The master's door was closed. "I'll give him time," Tim reflected. "Plenty of time, though maybe he isn't in there."

As he watched, Bill Ridley, wearing socks to muffle his footfalls, moved through the gloom and stepped quickly into the quarters, carefully closing the door behind him.

Tim, gun in hand, crossed the room and stood outside the door, listening. Then he entered.

"Don't move!" he ordered.

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Bill Ridley stood three feet from the safe, covering Brennan with a gun. Brennan had opened the safe door and his hand clutched the sealed envelope Tim had placed there. Tim grinned. The envelope contained blank paper—bait he hoped would trap any man who was afraid of a dead native's testimony.

"It looks as if we had the same idea, Banning," Bill Ridley drawled. "I had a hunch the guilty man would try and get that envelope. He pretty nearly had to get it to save his hide. Well, Brennan, what have you got to say?"

"Scalzo got options on old whalers in Frisco," Brennan said in his thick voice. "If the whaling fleet was lost, then he'd make a fortune.

"He never figured on the Government sending an Overland Expedition. And when it started, he never thought it could make it to Barrow. Well, he had to stop it. I was hired to help."

A new look came into his eyes. "I'll make a deal with you," he offered, his tone desperate. "If you'll forget what I've done, I'll testify against Scalzo."

"Just a minute," Bill protested before Tim could reply. "First we've got to catch Scalzo. He may be dead."

"Scalzo isn't dead. He's hiding out," Brennan said. "I know where you can find him. It's every man for himself in the showdown."

"Go ahead," Tim said, "and we'll think about your proposition."

"Wait!" Bill insisted. "It's understood we hang onto this cuss until Scalzo is caught. If Brennan should escape, we couldn't prove a thing on Scalzo even if we caught him."

"We'll put him in the *Aurora's* brig," Tim said.

BRENNAN rubbed his nose nervously with the knuckles of his right hand. "I had orders to open the *Mary Ridley's* sea cocks when she was in deep water," he said, "and sink her so she couldn't salvage the *Audacious*. I couldn't get 'em all the way open."

"And you damaged the *Audacious'* engines, too?" Tim asked.

The man nodded. "I got aboard once last spring when the ice brought her in, and worked two days on the engines. I worked out the combination of the safe—thought there might be something in it."

"Why should a paper that's supposed to identify the murderer of my herders interest you?" Tim asked.

"Well . . ." Again Brennan rubbed his nose. "I knew if I was caught, everything that happened to the Overland Expedition, including murder, might be laid on me."

"Now I'll say something, Banning," Bill said. "My parka with the ermine hood was stolen. Weeks later I found it in my gear. An attempt had been made to patch a bullet hole in the top, and to clean off bloodstains. I was still trying to figure it out when you accused me of murdering your herders. You had me so scared I burned the damned thing. And I thought a lot of it, too; my wife made that parka."

"There's no doubt of it," Tim said. "Scalzo stole the parka, hoping to turn suspicion on you. And now that I think of it, the Bannings and Ridleys might have gotten together long ago, but for Scalzo. When he was your agent, he stirred up a lot of feeling against us among the natives."

Tim turned to Brennan. "How's your face coming along?" he asked. "You used that as an excuse to ship aboard the *Mary Ridley*. Let's have a look."

"It's freshly bandaged," Brennan answered, "and—"

"Banning," Bill yelled, "you're

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right!" He reached for the bandage, but the man dived straight at Bill's gun and knocked it down. He struggled to turn the weapon on Tim while he shielded himself with Bill's body.

Bill lifted him upward with a powerfull heave. Brennan's head struck a deck beam above and suddenly he went limp. Bill laid him on the bunk, pulled off the parka, then yanked off the face bandages.

"Scalzo!" Bill exclaimed. "And look, there's a scalp scar where your bullet creased him the day your lead went through my ermine parka hood. No wonder he went limp when his head hit that beam."

Tim stared down at the bunk, unsurprised at the identity of the man with the frozen face. "He probably fainted after he killed my second herder," he said. "That's how his face froze. Then, with the bandages on, he was able to come up to Barrow unrecognized. The only man who got a look at him was Surgeon Newton, and the doctor had never seen Scalzo. So, with Newton to vouch for his frozen face, Scalzo was getting along fine—until now."

"Smart of him—offering to turn on Scalzo," Bill said. "He figured on keeping his face covered and escaping later. What aroused your suspicion?"

"I've only seen the man a few times, but once Uncle Sulphur-bottom had him in a jackpot," Tim explained, "and—"

"Sulphur-bottom has had every man in the whaling business in a jackpot some time or other, excepting my father," Bill interrupted.

Tim grinned. "This jackpot was different," he continued. "It involved leaving natives stranded on a floe, and a season's catch of fur Scalzo never paid for. Sulphur-bottom couldn't prove anything, but Scalzo didn't know it. Anyhow I noticed that when Scalzo thought he was cornered, he'd rub his chin with the knuckles of his hand and his eyes shifted. Tim frowned. "Then, too, for a long time I've had a feeling that Scalzo and Brennan were somehow connected. But I had nothing definite enough to act on."

"When he showed up at my cabin," Bill said slowly, "and wanted me to join him in a deal against you people, I knew it could end only one way. He'd knife me in the end.

"I knew it was time to sober up and start fighting. A year as a squawman makes a man bitter and suspicious.

"And I hated you. It was an inherited hate, but it grew after you got the better of me a couple of times. And I was jealous of you because you had a popularity with your men that we didn't have with ours.

"That day at Barrow when I threw in with the whalers looked like my big chance. Scalzo of course engineered that, but we couldn't know it. Fighting you when your back was to the wall was a squawman trick. My first, and the last."

"That's ice that's passed astern, Bill," Tim said. "You won their respect, and I kept the authority I needed, and the fight cleared the air. We'll lash this cuss to the bunk and go on deck. Maybe the *Aurora's* crashed through."

"One more thing, Tim," Bill said. "Our salvage claim against the *Audacious* is one dollar. It's Mary's idea. She doesn't think much of the Ridley tribe. But she remembered the *Audacious* got caught trying to help a Ridley whaler and she said she was damned if she was going to be in debt."

"So she don't think much of the Ridley tribe, eh?" Tim muttered as he went on deck.

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CHAPTER XXIX

THE SMILE OF SULPHUR-BOTTOM

"THERE'S an umiak comin' alongside, sir," a sailor informed Tim as he appeared on deck.

"That's Arnaretauk," Bill shouted. "And she's got the baby." He ran to the rail and yelled at her in English and dialect. "Look at her, Tim," he shouted, "she's as excited as a white girl."

He looked a long time, fondly, intently. "Some day," he said slowly, "I'm going deeper into the ice than any whaler has ever been, and I'm going to talk to the chief who sent her south. She's white. All white. But even if she isn't—it doesn't make any difference to me."

Bill ran down the gangway and scooped wife and child into his arms. Tim grinned, then his face sobered. A woman with murderous gleam in her eyes was following. "Hell's bells, it's Mrs. Antuk," he groaned. He smiled, however, and said, "Hello, Eve."

Eve did not smile back.

"What's matter you, damn-yes?" she demanded. "You give Antuk paper talk. He go *umiak puk* and paper talk say put 'em in jail. We marry by Book damn-yes. We honest. Missionary pat on back. White Oomailik paper talk lie."

It was evident Antuk had been arrested when he appeared on the *Aurora* with his paper talk. Eve had manned an umiak and followed the *Aurora* north, picking up Arnaretauk on the way.

It required five minutes and a drink of whisky to calm Eve. Tim promised Antuk's release as soon as his testimoney had been taken. The man had been discredited as a shaman and all Tim wanted was evidence that Scalzo had urged him to hamper the expedition.

"You tell me one thing," Tim said sharply. "Antuk say Oopick die and he die. How he know?"

Eve hesitated. "Oopick very sick already—he know he goin' die when Arnaretauk's baby come. Antuk tell Oopick he see dead man's shade puttin' arms around him. Oopick, scared like hell. He die."

"I thought so," Tim mused. "I'll mention that to the missionary when I see him again."

He decided that if the *Aurora* couldn't reach him, he might reach the *Aurora*. "I'll go along, too," Bill said, "and we'll pick up Mary."

Five hours later they stood on a floe, signaling the revenue cutter. She rode heavy from the burden of her cargo, and her scarred bows told of the battle with the ice. But there she lay, with her flag flying brightly, assurance that Uncle Sam hadn't forgotten. She would stock those ships that wished to continue whaling, and aid those that had to fight their way around Barrow for the southern voyage.

A whaleboat picked them up and placed them on the *Aurora's* gangway. Tim ran up, followed by the others. He saluted the skipper and made a brief verbal report, then placed his written report in his superior's hands.

"Surgeon Newton is waiting at Barrow," Tim said. "Now what's the news outside."

"The *Maine* was blown up in Havana harbor," the skipper answered, "and we've declared war on Spain."

"Then I'm getting into it," Tim declared.

The skipper grinned.

"We can go south on the *Mary Ridley,*" Bill added. "I wouldn't miss that rumpus for anything. Did you hear

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that, Mary—there's war with Spain and Tim and I are going."

She had paled a little, but she managed to smile. "Yes, I heard. I'll look after Arnareauk and things up here."

The deck resounded to a familiar thump and Tim turned around to see Sulphur-bottom Banning coming toward him. "Well," the old man said sourly, "as near as I can figger it out, you messed things up as usual."

"What're you doin' up here?" Tim demanded.

Sulphur-bottom grinned. "I got old Ridley into the jackpot of his life. While he was getting out of it, I figgered we Bannings would skin the pants off him in the whaling business. Then the war came along and we declared a truce.

"And why not? Americans can't fight each other when the whole country is saying, 'Remember The Maine!' I knew you young fools would have to get into it, though you'll probably make some costly blunder, so I'm up here to run the Banning and Ridley whaling interests."

"Did you hear that?" Tim asked, hurrying Mary aft to a point where they were unobserved. "I've fought you every inch of the way, but I couldn't make myself stop loving you. You probably hate me, Mary—"

"Hate you? I'd have hated you, Tim, if you'd quit fighting the way you had to fight," she answered. "And you didn't . . . so . . ."

"There's a missionary aboard," he said excitedly, "and . . ."

"And . . . damn-yes," she said, smiling up into his face.

THE END

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Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

THIS year, as some jubilant Irishman must have told you, Saint Patrick's Day falls on Palm Sunday. You know the legend, of course; that after a spell of bloodshed and bravery Ireland shall indeed be free, in the year that that chronological marvel occurs. Now we do not intend to get into a discussion of Irish politics, a subject which is reserved for brawny men; we comment on the legend of Saint Patrick's Palm Sunday simply because during these last few days the atmosphere of this office has been disturbed by restless ghosts.

We have felt it growing about us, this supernatural unease; it is intangible and yet strongly present, like the first warning of an electrical storm. But we sense it only when we are sitting in this room, surrounded by bound volumes of ARGOSY. And finally we have hit on what it is. This curious activity is the stirring of a thousand Irish heroes who have fought across the pages of ARGOSY. Swordsmen, athletes, adventurers in far lands, tough cops—they have all lived bravely, and now their shades are awakening, to salute in fitting fashion the arrival of this momentous Saint Patrick's Day. They were lively fellows, these ARGOSY heroes, and we pity any man who dares to murmur against the Irish Cause in this office next week.

A technical matter has come up again, and we're going to stay out of it. We turn over to

A. A. P.

I am not in the habit of taking an otherwise entertaining story and picking it to pieces because of technicalities, but in a story of the type which calls for technical accuracy such as "Windward Head" by George Masselman in the present issue, I believe the author should be more certain of his ground before attempting to write about radio operators.

Chronologically in the story the errors are as follows: He has the pilot come aboard okay, but apparently forgets to have him leave the ship after leaving the Maas River; fails to make the tests of his equipment before leaving the dock. As required by both U. S. Federal law, and international law.

Then when the operator starts watch, the author states, "within ten minutes every ship within a thousand miles knew Mr. Lamson was on the air." This is an absolute physical impossibility in the North Sea, because of all places in the world, there is more interference in the North Sea and English Channel than the next five most jammed-up places combined.

At the time of receipt of the Jap's SOS, he gives the time as 2.04 P.M., when the law specifies that time entries must be in the Greenwich twenty-four-hour system which would make the log entry 1404 GMT. Then the utterly crazy business of intercepting the name of the Japanese steamer *Takashuma Maru*. In actual practice, the SOS would be followed by the call letters of the Jap ship, which in themselves give the nationality, etc. Next: At the conclusion of the Jap's call we have our hero blandly sitting there and not answering the call. In fact, the author even states, "A radio operator has no right sending messages on his own hook."

This is quite true in regard to actual messages, but the law specifically states that any station hearing an SOS call must immediately acknowledge receipt of the call if he believes himself to be reasonably close to the distressed vesssel. You will note I say "acknowledge receipt"; the operator need not necessarily give his own position or anything else.

Then we have our hero leaving the radio room and going to the bridge to inform the captain of the SOS. This also is in direct opposition to the rules, which state that the operator must stay in the radio room listening and must call the bridge by telephone or voice tube and have the watch officer send a messenger to the radio room.

After the Queen tells him to QRT, we have him acting like a spoiled child. "He took off the earphones and threw them on the chair." In the next sentence he is aimlessly scribbling and

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daydreaming instead of keeping a strict watch and logging all pertinent data.

Mr. Masselman may possibly have been a radio operator himself many years ago, although I doubt this, as it would be almost impossible for a man to forget so much about his profession. What is more likely, he has some acquaintance who is or was a radio operator and got his facts hopelessly jumbled.

All in all, he paints a picture of the radio operator as being very inefficient, and childish, when in truth it is a highly technical and fairly dignified profession. I, for one, don't like it, as I have been going to sea in various capacities since shortly after World War 1, and have been a radio operator since about 1925.

Now a word of praise. Eustace Adam's story, "Loot Lies Deep" is not only extremely well written and entertaining, but it has very few technical errors. The only one I can think of is when the murderer rips out enough of the connections of the radio equipment to render it inoperative.

A murderer isn't likely to remain in the radio room long enough after the crime to do that, and besides, the way our modern equipment is constructed, it would be far more likely for the murderer to take a heavy object and smash all the tubes, which would take only a few seconds instead of several minutes, as would be necessary to rip out the wiring, even if he had a pair of wire-cutters handy.

Believe it or not, I really like ARGOSY, which along with *Detective Fiction Weekly*, is the source of much pleasure on voyages long and short.

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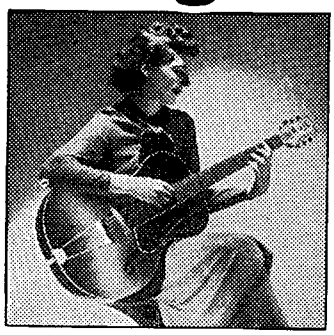

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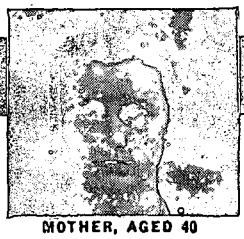

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Unless every member of your family is insured, sooner or later, you are bound to come face to face with the financial burdens that follow the footsteps of death.

Until this new Family Group Life Insurance Policy was created, life insurance on the entire family was so costly that only the wealthier families could carry it.

But now, thanks to the sound ideas of our actuaries, we found that if all members of the family were insured in one policy, we could save on policy costs, bookkeeping costs, mail, stamps, and other items. Then we decided that we could further save by hiring no agents who often get 50% or more of the premiums . . . we decided, too, that we would hire no collectors—pay no medical examination fees, and other frills . . . so that we could for only $1.00 a month give the whole family safe, reliable legal reserve insurance, paying benefits for death from any cause . . . and regardless of which member of the family died.

Don't confuse this old reliable company, issuing legal reserve insurance, with other less accepted types of benefits and contracts. This is genuine life insurance based on an actuarially sound group plan.

IF ANY ONE IN YOUR FAMILY DIES FROM ANY CAUSE WE PAY BENEFITS UP TO $3000 AS SHOWN IN THE POLICY

The Family Group Policy insures your entire family for a maximum of . . . .

$1,000 in event of ordinary or natural death as clearly explained in the policy; a maximum of . .

$2,000 in event of death by auto as shown in the policy; a maximum of

$3,000 in event of travel death as outlined in this marvelous Family Group Policy.

ACT NOW - SEND COUPON

READ THESE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. How many members of the Family can be covered by one policy?
A. There is no limit—all there are in the family.

Q. Is the Bankers Life and Casualty Company supervised by the Insurance Commission of the State of Illinois?
A. Yes, the policy has been approved by the Insurance Department and the Company's operations are under constant supervision of the State Government.

Q. Who can be included in the family group?
A. Husband and/or wife, their parents, their children, either adopted or natural. (3 generations.)—ALL FOR $1.00 A MONTH.

Q. Is a medical examination required?
A. No.

Q. Will a collector come around to get the payments?
A. No. The cost of collection by collectors would make it necessary to reduce benefits. Special cards and envelopes are supplied to policyholders for mailing payments.

Q. How long does the company take to pay their claims?
A. Within 24 hours after approval of the claim.

Q. Must all persons included in the policy be living in the immediate household of the applicant?
A. No.

PLEASE, SEND NO MONEY—

This policy is so outstanding and liberal that once you examine it, you will marvel at it. Without cost to you we will send complete details and tell you how to get the Family Group.

NO AGENT WILL CALL

Decide for yourself in the privacy of your own home whether this policy isn't the biggest insurance offer ever made by a dependable, reliable, life insurance company.

ACT NOW— AND RETURN COUPON AT ONCE

BANKERS LIFE AND CASUALTY CO.,
Bankers Insurance Bldg., Jefferson Sta., Desk 131
Chicago, Illinois.

☐ Please send details and tell me how to get the Family Group Policy for Free Inspection.

Name.....

Street or R.F.D.....

City..... State.....

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